



MEHALAH

A STORY OF THE
SALT MARSHES





Darell.
Trewornan, Cornwall.

1575



M E H A L A H

VOL. II.

MEHALAH

A STORY OF THE SALT MARSHES

IN TWO VOLUMES

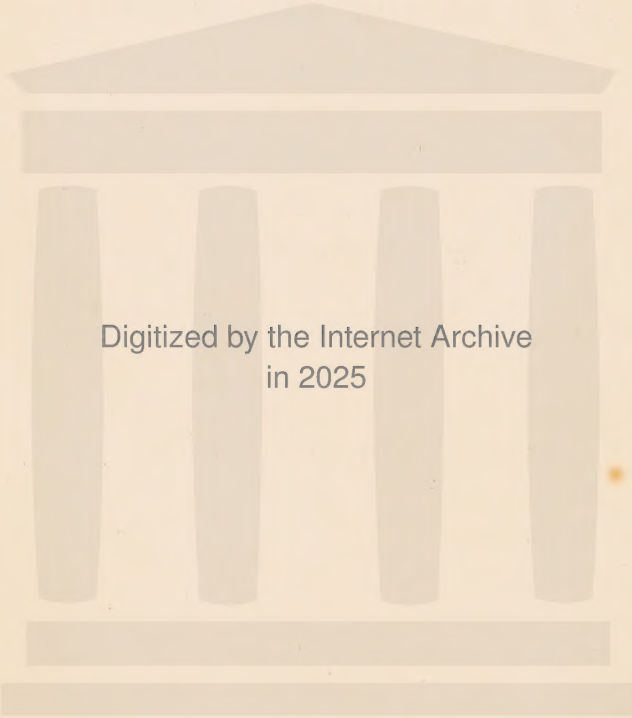
VOL. II.

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OF
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MEHALAH:

A STORY OF THE SALT MARSHES.

CHAPTER I.

IN NEW QUARTERS.

WHEN the boat reached the landing place for Red Hall, Mrs. Sharland was found to have been so overcome with terror, and numbed with frost, as to be unable to walk. She moaned under her blankets, but made no effort to rise. Elijah was obliged to carry her out of the boat upon the seawall, and then with the assistance of Mehalah she was conveyed to the house in their arms. Neither spoke, and Mrs. Sharland's lamentations over various articles she had prized, and which she feared were lost or destroyed, remained unattended to.

The old woman was wrapped up from the

cold in a blanket that enfolded her entire person and head, and she kept working an aperture for her face, whilst being carried, not so much to obtain air, as to give vent to queries.

‘My green bombazine,—where is it?’

The folds of the blanket closed over the face. The fingers worked at them, till they had made a gap.

‘Is the toad-jug saved?’ at the same time a point of a nose and a thin finger emerged from the wraps.

‘There was a dozen of Lowestoft soup-dishes!’ A jerk as she was being lifted over a rail sent her head and shoulders deeper into the blanket, and it was some minutes before she had grubbed a hole for herself again.

‘The warming-pan! I can’t go to bed unless I have the sheets aired.’

A spring across a dyke buried the old woman again ‘in woollen.’ She emerged only as the house was reached to exclaim ‘My rum!’

‘You’ve come where there’s lots of that,’ said Elijah, and he indicated with his chin to Mehalah to carry her up the steps into the hall.

A red fire was glowing and painting the walls. The great room was warm, and Mrs. Sharland

battled out of her envelopes as soon as she became aware that she was under cover.

‘Take me to bed,’ she said; ‘my legs are frozen. I can’t go a step. Oh! is the toad-jug saved?’

‘I will carry her now,’ said Elijah. ‘You light a candle, Glory, and follow me.’

He took the old woman over his shoulder, and led the way up the stairs. Mehalah followed with a light she had kindled at the hearth. He conducted into a bed-room, comfortably furnished, with white curtains to the windows, and a low tester bed in the corner.

‘Light the fire,’ he ordered, and Mehalah applied the candle to the straw and chips in the grate. Presently the flames were dancing up the chimney, and making the whole chamber glow. The old woman was laid on the bed.

‘This looks comfortable,’ said she; ‘just as if you was prepared for us.’

‘I was prepared for you. Everything was ready. Glory knows that I have been expecting you and her. I told her she must come, sooner or later. Sooner or later the same roof must cover both, as sooner or later the same grave will hold us both. She would fight me, and would

not come to me, but her destiny is stronger than her will. My will is the destiny of her life. It shapes and directs it.'

Mehalah did not speak. She could not speak. She was stunned. A belt of iron bound her heart and restrained its free bounds, a weight of lead crushed her brain and killed its independence of action. She, who had been hitherto a law to herself, whose will had been unfettered, now discovered herself a captive under the thralldom of a will mightier, or more ungovernable, than her own. She had no time or power to think how to escape, and free herself from the situation in which she was placed. All her thoughts that she could collect must be about her mother. She must think of herself when she had more leisure. But though she could not think of herself, she could feel that she was conquered, and a captive, and that escape would not be easy.

'There,' said Elijah, indicating a door, 'there is another little room for you and your mother to put away what you like. If you want anything, come down stairs.'

Elijah went heavily down the stairs and out at the door. Mehalah looked from the window, and saw him on his way to the boat. He was

going back to the Ray. She could still see a red cloud hanging over her burnt home. The tears rose in her heart at the sight, but would not well out at her eyes. She stood and looked long at the dying fire, drawing the window curtain behind her to screen from her the light of the room. Her mother lay quiet, evidently pleased at having got into such comfortable quarters, and exhausted with her alarm. By degrees she dozed off into unconsciousness of her loss and of her situation, and Mehalah remained at the window looking moodily over the fens and the water, at the ruby spark that marked her old home.

She was standing in the same place when the boats arrived, bringing portions of their goods to Red Hall. She heard the voices of Rebow and other men below. She opened the door and listened. He was giving them something to eat and drink. Abraham Dowsing was there. She could distinguish his voice.

‘If I hadn’t turned you out, you’d have been burnt,’ said Rebow.

‘A good job for mistress we saved the cow-house,’ answered Abraham, with sulky unwillingness to admit that he was indebted to Elijah for anything.

‘Don’t you think you owe me your life?’ asked Rebow.

‘The cowhouse didn’t burn.’

‘No. But it would have, had not we been there to keep the flames off,’ observed one of the men.

‘Good job for mistress I wasn’t burnt. I don’t know how she’d got along without me.’

‘It did not matter particularly to yourself then, Abby?’

‘Don’t know as it did. A man must die some time, and I’ve always heard as smothering is a nice quiet sort of death—better than being racked with cramps and tormented with rheumatics and shivered into the pithole with agues.’ After a pause Abraham’s voice was heard to add, ‘Besides, I should have woke, myself, with the fire and smoke.’

‘Not you. And if you had, what could you have done to save the old woman? She’d have been burnt to a cinder before you woke.’

‘That’s mistress’ matter, not mine,’ answered Dowsing.

‘You could not have got the things out of the house.’

‘They are not mine,’ retorted Abraham angrily.

‘You are not going to make a merit to me of saving what are the belongings of other folk?’

‘They belong to your mistress.’

‘Well, so they do, that is, they don’t belong to me; so none of your boasting to me, as if I owed you anything.’ This ungracious remark, but one not unnatural for a rude peasant jealous lest an obligation should place him in a position of disadvantage, was followed by silence, during which the party ate.

Presently Abraham asked, ‘How came you to be there?’

‘Master sent Jim out with me in the big boat after ducks, and he was in the punt,’ answered one of the men. ‘He bade us lie by at the mouth of the Rhyn, while he went on to drive the birds our way; there was a lot, and we thought to pepper into a whole flight. He was not long away—not above an hour—when we saw the Ray house afire, and heard him shouting to us to come on, so we rowed as hard as hard, and by the time we landed he had broke open the door, and got the old lady out. We helped as best we might, and saved a deal of things.’

‘They ain’t worth much,’ said Abraham.

‘There’s nothing in the house worth five pound—

take the whole lot. The cow was the only thing would pay for saving, and she was safe. I slept in the loft over her.'

'The life of your mistress was worth something, I hope, Abby.'

'Don't know that. Not to me, anyhow. She's not mistress; it is Mehalah that orders, and does everything. I don't reckon an old woman's life is worth a crown, not to nobody but herself, may be; but that is her concern not mine. She was an ailing aguish body. Why!' exclaimed Abraham banging his can of ale on the table, 'when you've saved an old woman who is nought but a trouble to everybody as does with her, of what wally is it? They might have paid you to let her alone, but not to lug her out of the fire. Now, Mehalah, she was another sort. But you didn't save her.'

'Where was she? She was not in the house.'

'How am I to know? I don't spy after her. Others may,' he gave a sly, covert look at Elijah, 'I don't. But I reckon she was out on the saltings watching for the sheep-stealers.'

'Have you had sheep-stealers on the Ray?'

'Aye, we have.'

'Did you watch for them at night?'

'I!' with a grunt. 'They were not my sheep.'

No, thank you. Let them that wallys the sheep watch 'em. I do what I'm paid to do, and I don't do more.'

Mehalah did not listen to the whole of this conversation. She had satisfied herself that Abraham was there, and had heard how Rebow and his men came to be on the spot when the fire broke out; she then closed the door again, and returned to the window. She did not leave her station till dawn, except to attend to the fire, to make it up from the heap stacked by the side of the chimneypiece. When day began to break, she seated herself on a stool by the bed, and laying her head on the mattress fell asleep, and slept for an hour or two, uneasily, troubled by dreams and the discomfort of her position.

When she awoke the house was quiet. She went down stairs, with reluctance, and found no one stirring, but the fire made up, and a kettle boiling over it, the table spread with everything she could desire for breakfast. Elijah, Abraham and the other men were gone. There was a canister with tea on the board. Mehalah made her mother some, and took it up to her.

The old woman was awake, and drank the tea with eagerness.

‘I don’t think I can get out of bed to-day, Mehalah!’ she said. ‘I feel my limbs all of an ache; the cold has got into the marrow of my bones, and I feel as if the frost were splitting them, as at times it will split pipes. I must lie abed till the thaw comes to them.’

‘Can you eat anything?’

‘I think I can.’

‘Mother, how long are we going to remain here?’

‘It is wery comfortable, I am sure.’

‘But we cannot stay in this house.’

‘Where else can we go?’

‘I will get into service somewhere.’

‘You cannot leave me. Where shall I go? I cannot leave my bed, and I don’t think the frost will get out of my bones for a week or more.’

‘I can not, I will not, remain here.’

‘Where can we go?’

Mehalah put both her hands to her brow. She could not answer this question. Were she alone, she could get a situation in a farmhouse, perhaps; but with a sick mother dependent on her, this was not possible. No farmer would take them both in for the sake of her services.

‘Where else can we go?’ again asked Mrs.

Sharland ; then in a repining voice, ‘If Master Rebow houses us for a while, it is very good of him, and we must be thankful, for we have no chance of shelter elsewhere. Where is the money to pay for rebuilding the farmhouse? Do you think my cousin, Charles Pettican——’

‘No, no,’ exclaimed Mehalah, ‘not a word about him.’

‘He spoke up and promised most handsomely,’ said Mrs. Sharland.

‘He can do nothing, mother, I will not ask him.’

‘A man that has a gilded balcony to his house wouldn’t miss a few pounds for running up a wooden cottage.’

‘I will not go to him again.’

‘My dear child,’ said Mrs. Sharland, ‘I don’t doubt he would take us in on a visit for a while, when we are forced to leave Red Hall.’

‘You think we shall not be obliged to remain here?’

‘I don’t see how we can. It is very good of Master Rebow to house us for a bit, but I doubt we can’t stick as fixtures. I only wish we could. Anyhow stay here a bit we must. We have nowhere else to go to, except to my cousin Charles.’

Mehalah knew what this alternative was worth. It was a relief to her to hear her mother speak of their stay in Red Hall as only temporary. She could not endure to contemplate the possibility of its being permanent. She formed a hope that she would be able to find work somewhere, and hire a small cottage ; she was strong enough to do as much as a man.

During the day, everything that had been rescued from the fire on the Ray was brought to Red Hall, even the cow, which was driven round by land, a matter of eleven miles. The old clock arrived, and was set up in the large room below, an old cypress chest or 'spruce hutch' as Mrs. Sharland called it, covered with curious shallow carvings picked out with burnt umber, representing a hawking party, that contained her best clothes, and was a security against moth, was conveyed into her bedroom. It weighed half a ton. The old Lowestoft dishes she valued were placed in the rack in the hall along with the ware that belonged to Elijah. The toad jug, a white jug with a painted and glazed figure of a toad squatting inside it in the neck, was also brought to Red Hall, so even were two biscuit-china poodles with shaven posteriors and with manes and

tufted tails, that had stood on the chimneypiece at the Ray. The warming-pan of brass with a stamped portrait of H.M. George I. on it was likewise transported to Red Hall, and hung up in the little oak-panelled parlour behind the entrance hall generally occupied by Rebow.

By degrees most of the property of Mrs. Sharland was brought to the house, and the small oak parlour was furnished with it. Her arm chair of leather with high back was placed in the hall by the great fireplace that bore the inscription, 'When I hold, I hold fast.' There were also some things belonging specially to Glory that had been saved, and these were put in the oak parlour. The satisfaction of Mrs. Sharland at finding herself surrounded by her goods was extreme. She did not leave her bed, but she insisted on her daughter bringing her up everything that could be carried, that she might turn it about, and inspect it minutely and rejoice over what was uninjured, and bewail what had suffered. One of the poodles had lost an ear and part of its tail. The old woman cried and grumbled and scolded about this injury, as though it were on a level with the destruction of the house. She would see the men Jim and Joe who had brought

it from the Ray in the boat ; she catechised them minutely, she insisted on knowing which had brought the dog out of the burning house, where it had been placed till removal, and fretted, till they promised to examine the spot beneath the thorn tree where the china brute had spent the night, and also the bottom of the boat, for the missing tail tuft and ear tip

‘ You know,’ she said, ‘ if I boil them in milk with the dog, I can get them to stick on.’

Among certain persons, the mind is destitute of perspective, and consequently magnifies trifles and disregards great evils. Mrs. Sharland had a mind thus constituted. She harped all day on the battered biscuit-china dog, because it was placed on the mantelpiece of her bedroom, and was under her eyes whenever she turned her head that way. The farmhouse was almost forgotten in her distress about the tail ; her flaming home formed but a red background to the mutilated white poodle.

Mehalah saw nothing of Elijah Rebow all day. He was several times in the house, directly her foot sounded on the stairs, however, he disappeared. But she saw and felt that he was considering her ; his care to recover all the little treasures and

property on the Ray evinced this ; and in the house he provided everything she could need ; he placed meat on the table in the hall for her dinner, and had boiled potatoes over the fire. They were set ready for her, she had only to take them out. Her mother ate heartily, and was loud in expressions of satisfaction at the comfort that surrounded them.

‘I hope, Mehalah, we shan’t have to leave this in a hurry.’

Glory did not answer.

Towards evening Abraham Dowsing arrived with the cow. The girl heard the low, and ran down—she could not help it—and threw her arms round the neck of the beast. There was a back stair leading to the kitchen and yard, by which she could descend without entering the hall, and by this means she avoided Elijah who, she was aware, was there.

Elijah however came to the top of the steps after she had descended, and looked into the yard where she was. Mehalah at once desisted from lavishing her tenderness on the animal.

Abraham stood sulkily by.

‘I’ve had a long bout,’ he said.

‘I dare say you have, Abraham,’ she answered.

‘I want something to eat and drink, I haven’t bit nought since morning. There’s nothing but ashes on the Ray now, and they are red-hot. You don’t expect me to fill my belly on them.’

Mehalah put her hand to her mouth and checked her tongue, as she was about to tell him to go indoors and get some supper. She had now nothing to give the old man. She lived on the bounty of Rebow.

‘I cannot go without my wittles,’ persisted Abraham. ‘Now I want to know where my wittles are to come from. I paid fourpence at the Rose for some bread and cheese, and you owes me that.’

‘There is the money,’ said Mehalah producing the coin.

‘Ah! that is wery well. But where am I to get my wittles now? Am I your servant or ain’t I? If I am,—where’s my wittles?’

‘Come here, Abraham,’ said Elijah, from the kitchen door. ‘There is bread and cold potatoes and meat here. You shall have your supper, and you can sleep in the loft.’

‘Look here, master,’ pursued the sullen old man, ‘I want to know further where I’m to look for my wages.’

‘To me,’ said Rebow. ‘I take you on,’

‘Where am I to work?’

‘Here, or on the Ray, looking after the sheep.’

‘The sheep are not yours, they are hers,’—
pointing to Mehalah with his thumb.

‘The Ray and Red Hall are one concern,’
answered Rebow. ‘You look to me as your
master, and to her as your mistress;’ then he
entered and slammed the door.

Abraham shrugged his shoulders. He leered
at Mehalah, who had put her hands to her fore-
head.

‘When are you going to church? Eh, mis-
tress? I thought it was coming to this. But I
don’t care so long as I gets my wittles and wage.’

Abraham went slowly into the cattlehouse
with the cow. Mehalah remained rooted to the
spot, pressing her brow.

This was more than she could endure. She
ran up the steps, she would speak to Rebow
while her heart was full. She dashed through the
kitchen and into the hall. He was not there.
As she ran on, she tripped and almost fell; and
recovered herself with horror. She had almost
precipitated herself through the trap into the
vault beneath. The door was thrown back, her

foot had caught this. Faugh! an odour rose from the cellar as from the lair of a wild beast. She looked in, there was the maniac racing up and down in the den fastened by his chain, jabbering and uttering incoherent cries. He was almost naked, covered with filthy rags, and his hair hung over his face so that she could distinguish no features by the dim light that strayed down from the trap, and from the horn lanthorn that Elijah had placed on the steps. Rebow had a pitchfork, and he was tossing fresh straw to his brother, and raking out the sodden and crushed litter of the wretched man.

Mehalah could not bear the sight; she withdrew. She needed a little while by herself to consider what was best to be done, to think of what had taken place. She opened the front door, and descended by the long flight of steps over the arch. Then she saw that a shutter covered the circular window that in summer lighted the den of the maniac. This was now closed to shut out the cold of winter. There was a door. As she looked, Rebow opened it from within, and appeared, raking out the litter and the gnawed bones, the relics of his brother's repasts. He did not notice her, or he pretended

not to do so, and she shrank back. Her wish to speak with him had gone from her. She was not equal to an interview till she had been alone for a while, and had gathered up her strength. An interview with him must be a contest. It was clear to her that he was resolved that she should stay at Red Hall. She was equally determined not to do so. But how to get away and remove her mother was more than she could discover.

She left the house and the garden round it, and walked through the meadow till she reached the sea wall. She ascended that, and went along it to the spot where the Red Hall marsh divided the Tollesbury Fleet from the Virley and Salcott Creeks.

Then she threw herself beneath the windmill, the mill that pumped the water out of the dykes, and worked day and night whenever there was wind to move the sails. The mill was now at work. The wings rushed round, and the pump painfully creaked, and after every stroke sent a dash of water into the sea over the wall.

Mehalah hoped that here, away from her mother and Rebow, and the sights and sounds of Red Hall, she might be able to think. But it was not so. Her numbed head was unable to form any

plans. She looked out to sea, it was leaden grey, ruffled with angry waves, and the mews screamed and dipped in them. The sky overhead was overcast. The Bradwell shore looked grey and bleak and desolate; there was not a sail in the offing. The fancy took her to sit and wait, and if she saw a ship pass to take it as a good omen, a promise of escape from her present perplexity.

She sat and waited. The sea darkened to a more sullen tint. The mews were no longer visible. Mersea with its trees and church tower disappeared. Bradwell coast loomed black as pitch against the last lingering light of day. Not a sail appeared.

Far away, out to sea, as the darkness deepened, gleamed a light. It gleamed a moment, then grew dim and disappeared in the blackness. A minute, and then it waxed, but waned again, and once more all was night. So on, in wearisome iteration. What she saw was the revolving Swin light fifteen miles from land, a floating Pharos. She thought of Elijah's words, she thought of the horrible iterations in the barrow on the hill, the embracing and fighting, embracing and fighting, loving and hating, loving and hating, till one should conquer of the twin but rival powers.

CHAPTER II.

FACE TO FACE.

MEHALAH returned slowly to the house, her spirits oppressed with gloom. It was night without and within, before her face, and in her soul. The wind sighed and sobbed among the rushes and over the fen, in a disconsolate, despairing manner, and the breath of God within—the living soul—sighed and sobbed like His breath that blew over the wintry marsh without. Not a star looked down from his heaven above, and none looked up from his heaven below in the little confines of a human heart. Mehalah could scarce see her way in the fen, among the dykes and drains; she was as unable to find a path in the level of her life.

She reached Red Hall at last, and mounted the front stairs to the principal door. She would see Elijah now. It were better to speak with him and come to some understanding at once. It was

intolerable to allow the present position to remain unexplained, and the future undetermined. She hesitated at the door. It was not without a struggle that she could open it and go in and face the man whose hospitality she was receiving and yet whom she abhorred. She knew that she was greatly indebted to him. He had saved her mother's life, he had secured from destruction a large amount of their property; yet she could not thank him. She resented his intrusion into their affairs, when anyone else would have been unobjectionable. She disliked him all the more because she knew she was heavily in his debt; it galled her almost past endurance to feel that she and her mother were then subsisting on his bounty.

‘Come in, Glory!’ shouted Elijah from within, as she halted at the door.

She entered. He was seated by the fire with his pipe in his hand; he had heard her step on the stairs, and had paused in his smoking, and had waited in a listening, expectant attitude.

He signed her to take a chair—her mother's chair—on the other side of the hearth. She paid no attention to the sign, but stood in the middle of the room, and unconsciously covered her eyes with her hands. Her pulses quivered in her tem-

ples. Her heart grew cold, and a faintness came over her.

‘The light is not too strong to dazzle you,’ said Elijah, ‘put your hands down, I want to see your face.’

She made an effort to retain them where they were, but could not; they fell.

‘Sit down.’

She shook her head.

‘Sit down.’

‘I want to speak with you, Elijah, for a moment. I must speak with you.’ Her heart palpitated, her breast heaved. She could only utter short sentences.

‘Sit down there!’ he beckoned with the stalk of his pipe.

She still refused to obey. Her power was slipping from her. The exhaustion after the excitement she had gone through had affected even her stout will. She resolved to oppose him in this trifling matter, but knew that her resolution was infirm. She clung desperately to what remained to her of power.

‘I will not listen to a word you say unless you sit down.’

He paused, and looked at her; then he said,

‘Go to your mother!’ and continued his smoking, with face averted.

‘Elijah, I know what you have done, and are doing now for my mother.’

He sprang from his seat, and strode up and down the room, turning and glowering at her, sucking at his pipe, and making it red and angry like his eyes in the firelight. He walked fast and noisily on the brick floor, with his high shoulders up and his head down. She watched him with painful apprehension; he reminded her of the mad brother pacing in the vault below. She could not speak to him whilst he persisted in this irritating, restless tramp. There was no help for it. She dropped into her mother’s leather chair.

‘There!’ said he, and he flung a ring with some keys attached to it, into her lap. ‘Take them. They are yours now. The keys of everything in the house, except of——’ he jerked his pipe towards the den beneath.

‘I cannot take them,’ she said, and let them slide off her lap upon the floor.

‘Pick them up!’ he ordered.

‘No,’ she said firmly, ‘I will not. Elijah, we must come to an understanding with each other.’

‘We already understand each other,’ he said,

pausing in his walk. 'We always did. I can read your heart. I know everything that passes there, just as if it was written in red letters on a page. I understand you, and there's nobody else in the world that can. I was made to read you. I heard a Baptist preacher say one day that God wrote a book, and then He created mankind to read it. You are a book, and God made me to read you. I can do it. That wants no scholarship, it comes by nature to me. Others can't. They might puzzle and rack their heads, they'd make nothing of you. But you are clear as light of day to me. You understand me?'

'I do not.'

'You *will* not. You set your obstinate, wicked mind against understanding me. I heard a preacher once say—I went to chapel along of my mother when I was a boy; I goes nowhere now but to the Ray after you—What is God? It is that as makes a man, and keeps him alive, and gives him hopes of happiness, or plunges him in hell. Every man has his own God; for there is something different makes and mars each man. What do I want but you, Glory? It is you that can make and keep me alive, and you are my happiness or my hell.'

‘But,’ said he standing still again, and flourishing his hand and pipe, ‘as I was saying, I heard a preacher say once, that God made every man of a lump of clay and a drop of spittle, and that he made always two at a time. He couldn’t help it. He has two hands and ain’t right and left-handed as we, but works with both, and then he casts about the men he has made, anywhere. Hasn’t he made all things double? Have not you two hands and two feet and two eyes? Is there not a sun and a moon, are there not two poles to the earth, and two sexes, and day and night, and winter and summer? and—’ he went up before Mehalah, and with a burst of passion—‘and you and me?’ Then he recommenced his pacing, but slower, and continued, ‘Wherever those two are that God made with his two hands, they must come together. It don’t matter where they be, if one is in Mersea, and t’other is in Asia, or Africa, or China, or America, or London, it don’t matter, soon or late, they must come together, and when they come together then they are in Heaven. Now if a man takes some other left-handed figure—it was the left hand made woman—then it don’t matter, he can’t go against his destiny. He has taken the wrong woman, and he is not happy.’

He knows it all along, and he feels restless and craving in his soul, and if he does not find the proper one in this world when he goes out of it, he waits and wanders, till the proper one dies and begins to hunt about for her right-hand man. That is what makes ghosts to ramble. Ghosts are those that have married the wrong ones, wandering and waiting, and seeking for their right mates. Do you hear the piping and the crying at the windows of a winter night? That is the ghosts looking in and sobbing because they are out in the cold shivering till they meet their mates. But when they meet, then that is heaven. There's a heaven for everyone, but that is only once for all when the two doubles find each other, and if that be not in this life, why it is after. And there is a hell too, but that isn't reserved for all, and it does not last for ever and ever, but is only when one has taken the wrong mate and has found it out.' He stopped. He had become very earnest and excited by what he had said. He came again over against Mehalah. 'Glory!' he continued, 'don't you see how the moon goes after the sun and cannot come to him? She is his proper mate and double, and the sun don't know, and won't have it, and so day and night, and winter and

summer, and waxing and waning goes on and on. But that won't go on for ever. The sun will grow sad at heart, and wane for want of the moon some day, and then there will be a great flare and blaze and glory, and they will be in heaven. And now the two poles of the earth are apart, and so long as they keep apart, the world rolls on in misery and pain, and that is what makes earthquakes, and volcanoes, and great plagues—the poles are apart which ought to be together. But they are drawing gradually nearer each other. The seasons now are not what they used to be, and that is it. The poles are not where they were, they are straining to meet. And some day they will run into one, and that will be the end. I've heard say that in the Bible it is spoken that there'll be an end of this world. I could have known that without the Bible. The poles must come together some day, and be one. Glory!' he went on, 'you and I are each other's doubles, you was made with God's left hand, and I with his right, at the same moment of time, and He cast you into the Ray, and me to Red Hall. There was not much space between, only some water and ooze and marsh, and we've been drawing and drawing nearer and closer for ever so long, and

now you are here, under my roof. You can't help it. You cannot fight agin it. You was made for me and I for you, and you'll have a life of hell unless you take me now. I must be yours. You thought you'd resist and take George De Witt. It might have been. Suppose you had, and I had died years before you. You would have heard me crying at your window and beating at your door, and you would have felt me drawing and drawing of you, whether you chose or not, taking the heart away from your George, and bringing it to me. Then at last, you'd have died, and then, then, you'd have been mine, and you would have found our heaven after thirty, forty, fifty years of hell.'

The terrible earnestness of the man imposed on Mehalah. He spoke what he believed. He gave utterance, in his rude fierce way, to what he felt. She, untaught, full of dim gropings after something higher, vaster, than the flat, narrow life she led, was startled.

'Heaven with you !' she cried, drawing back ;
'never ! never !'

'Heaven with me, and with none but me. You can't get another heaven but in my arms, for you was made for me by God. I told you so,

but you would not believe it. Try, if you like, to find it elsewhere. God didn't make you and George De Witt out of one lump. He couldn't have done it—*You*, Glory! strong, great, noble, with a will of iron, and that weak, helpless, vulgar lout, tied to his mother's apron. He couldn't have done it. He made, like enough, Phoebe Musset and George De Witt out of one piece, but you and me was moulded together at the same time, out of the same clay, and the same breath is in our hearts, and the same blood in our veins. You can't help it, it is so. You can not, you shall not, escape me. Soon or late you must find your proper mate, soon or late you must seek your double, soon or late find your heaven.'

He came now quietly and seated himself in his chair opposite Mehalah.

'What did you fare to say, Glory?' he asked. 'I interrupted you.'

'I must thank you first for what you have done for my mother.'

'I have done nothing for her,' said Elijah sharply.

'You drew her out of the burning house. You saved her goods from the flames. You have sheltered her here.'

‘I have done nothing for her,’ said Elijah again. ‘Whatever I have done, I did for you. But for you she might have burned, and I would not have put out a finger to help her. What care I for her? She is naught to me. She wasn’t destined for me; that was you. I saved her because she was *your* mother. I collected *your* things from the blazing house. I have taken *you* in. I take her in only as I might take in your shoe, or your cow, because it is *yours*. She is naught to me. I don’t care if I never saw or heard her again.’

He got up and went to the window, took a flask thence; then brought his gun from a corner, and began to polish the brass fittings with rag, having first put on the metal some of the vitriol from the bottle.

‘Look at this,’ he said dropping some of the acid on the tarnished brass. ‘Look how it frets and boils till it has scummed away the filth, and then the brass is bright as gold. That’s like me. I’m fretted and fume with your opposition, and I dare say it is as well I get a little. But after a bit it will bring out the shining metal. You will see what I am. You don’t like me now, because I’m not shapely and handsome as your George

De Witt. But there is the gold metal underneath ; he was but gilt pinchbeck—George De Witt !’ he repeated. ‘ That was a fancy of yours, that he was your mate ! You could not have loved him a week after you’d known what he was. Marriage would have rubbed the plating off, and you would have scorned and cast him aside.’

‘ Elijah !’ said Mehalah, ‘ I cannot bear this. I loved once, and I shall love for ever,—not you ! —you—never,’ with gathering emphasis, ‘ George, only George, none but George.’

‘ More fool you,’ said Rebow sulkily. ‘ Only I don’t believe it. You say so to aggravate me, but you don’t think it.’

She did not care to pursue the subject. She had spoken out her heart, and was satisfied.

‘ Well, what else had you to say ? I didn’t think you was one of the bread and butter curtsey-my-dears and thanky, sirs ! That is a new feature in you, Glory ! It is the first time I’ve had the taste of thanks from you on my tongue.’

‘ You never gave me occasion before.’

‘ No more I did,’ he answered. ‘ You are right there. And I don’t care for thanks now. I’d take them if I valued them, but I don’t. I don’t

care to have them from you. I don't expect thanks from my body when I feed it, nor from my hands when I warm 'em at the fire ; they belong to me, and I give 'em their due. What I do for you I do for myself, for the same reason. You belong to me.'

'I must speak,' said Mehalah. 'This is more than I can endure. You say things of me, and to me, which I will not suffer. Do you mean to insult me? Have I ever given you the smallest reason to encourage you to assume this right?'

'No. But it must be. You can't always go against fate.'

'I do not believe in this fate, this destiny, of which you talk,' said the girl gathering up her strength, as her indignation swelled within her. 'You have no right over me whatever. I have been brought here against my will, but at the same time I cannot do other than acknowledge your hospitality. Had you not given us a shelter, I know not whither we should have gone. I ask you to let us shelter here a little longer, but only a little longer, till I have found some situation where I can work, and support my mother. We must sell our little goods, our sheep and cow, and with the proceeds——'

‘With the proceeds you will have to pay the rent of the Ray to Lady Day.’

‘You cannot be so ungenerous,’ gasped Mehalah, flashing wrathfully against him. ‘This undoes all your kindness in housing us. But if it must be, so be it. We will sell all, and pay you every penny ; yes, and for our keep in this house, as long as we are forced to remain.’

‘Not so fast, Glory,’ said Elijah composedly. ‘There are various things to be considered first. You can’t find a situation—no one would take you in along of an old bedridden mother.’

‘I can but try.’

‘Aye, try ; try by all means, and then come back to me. You have tried a deal of tricks to escape me, but you can’t do it. You tried by borrowing money of George De Witt, you tried by going to that old palsied shipbuilder, you tried at Parson Tyll’s, you tried, I don’t know how at last, and you got the money ; but yet you couldn’t escape me. You tried to get George De Witt as your husband, to keep you from me in life, but it came to naught. He’s gone out of the path that leads from you to me. You may heap up what you will, but the earth will open, and swallow all obstructions, and leave the way smooth and open.

Did you ever see the old place—they call it the Devil's Walls—by Payne's? No, I dare say you don't know thereabouts. Well, I'll tell you how that spot lies waste, and covered with brambles and nettles now. The old lords D'Arcy thought to build a castle there. Then the Salcott creek ran up so far, and they could row and sail right up to their gates, were the mansion built. But it could not be. The masons built all day, and at night the earth sucked the walls in. They worked there a whole year, and they brought stones from Kent, and they poured in boulders, and they laid bricks, but it was all of no good, the earth drank in everything they put on it, as water. At last they gave it up, and they built instead on the hill where stands Barn Hall. It will be the same with you. You may build what you like, and where you like, it will go; it cannot stand, it will be swallowed up; you can only build on me.'

'Elijah! I insist on your listening to me. I will not hear this.'

'You will not? I do not care, you must. My will will drink in yours. But go on; say what you wish.'

'I am going to propose this. Pay me a wage, and I will work here. I will attend to the house

and the cows, and do anything you require of me. You have no servant, and you need one. You shall let me be your servant. I shall not be ashamed to be that, but I will not remain here unless my place be determined and recognised.'

'You shall be the mistress.'

'I do not want, I do not choose to be anything else in this house but your hired servant. Pay me a wage, and I will remain till I can find some other situation; refuse, and, if I have to leave my mother, I will go out of this house to-night.'

'If you leave your mother, I will throw her out.'

'I would fetch her away. I would carry her in my arms. I will not stay here on any other terms.'

'I will humour you. You shall be paid. I will give you five shillings a week. Is that enough?'

'More than enough, with my keep and that of my mother. I thank you now. In future speak of me to the men as their fellow servant, and not as you did recently to Abraham as their mistress.'

'I shall speak to them as I like. Am I to be controlled by you?'

'Then I will leave. I will carry my mother

to the inn at Salcott, and rest there till I can find some other shelter.'

'Now look here, Glory,' said Elijah. He put his gun aside, and leaned his elbows on his knees, and faced her. 'It is of no use your talking of running away from me. You may run, but I can draw you back. I sit here of a night brooding over my fire, I begin thinking of you. I think, I think, and then a spirit takes me as it were, and fills me with fierce will, to bring you here. I feel I have threads at every finger and threads to my knees and to my feet, all fast to you, and if I stir, I move you. I lift my finger, and you raise yours. I wave my hand up, and you throw up yours. You don't know it. I do. I know that I have but to rise up from my chair, and I lift you up wherever you may be, in your bed, in your grave, and then, if I draw in with my will, I wind up these threads, and you come, you come, from wheresoever you are, just as you are, out of your bed in your smock, out of your grave in your shroud; doors are nothing, my will can burst them open; locks are naught, my will can wrench them off; the screws in the coffin lid and five feet of earth are nothing, I could draw you through all. I could draw you over the ooze, and you would

not be sucked in by it. I could draw you over the water, and you would not wet your foot. I could draw you through the marsh and you would not break a bullrush ; look there—' he waved his arm towards the door. ' That door would fly open, and there you would stand, like one dreaming, with your eyes wide open as they are now, with your cheek colourless as now, with your lips parted as now, helpless, unable to stir a finger, or utter a sound, against my will, and you would rush into my arms, and fall on my heart. I can do all that. I feel it. I know it. I have sat here and wanted to do it, but I have not. I would not have you come to me in that way, but come of your own free will. You must come to me one way or other. Look here ! ' he raised his hand, and involuntarily, unconsciously, she lifted hers.

‘ Pick up the keys. ’

She stooped and took them up.

‘ One day, ’ he said, ‘ you refused to take a piece of money that fell, when I bade you. Now you are more compliant. My will is gaining over yours. Your will is stout and rebellious, but it must bend and give way before mine. Go ; I have done with you for the present. ’

CHAPTER III.

IN A COBWEB.

A MONTH passed. Mrs. Sharland recovered, as far as recovery was possible to one of her age and enfeebled constitution, much shaken by the events of the night that saw the destruction of her home and the abrasion of the ear and tail of her biscuit-china poodle. After remaining in bed for more than a week, Mehalah almost by force obliged her to get up and descend. When once she had taken this step and found that her leather high-backed chair was before the fire in the hall, she showed no further desire to spend her days upstairs. Her life resumed the old course it had run at the Ray, but she sat more by the fire, and did less in the house than formerly. She devolved most of the domestic work on her daughter. That she had declined in strength of late was obvious. Old people will go on from

year to year without any visible alteration, till some shock, or change in their surroundings takes place, when they drop perceptibly a stage, and from that moment declension becomes rapid.

Mrs. Sharland was unmistakably contented with her position at Red Hall. She enjoyed comforts which were not hers at the Ray. She saw more people, some gossip reached her ears. There was a village, Salcott, within two miles, and the small talk of a village will overflow its bounds, and dribble into every house in its neighbourhood. Every little parish throws up its coarse crop of vulgar tittle-tattle, on which the inhabitants feed, and which is exactly adapted to their mental digestion. Human characters as well as skins are subject to parasitic attacks, but human beings are the vermin which burrow their heads into, and blow themselves out on the blood of moral life. There are certain creatures which will lie shrivelled up on their backs, and endure flood and frost and burning sun, without its killing them, with suspended animation, till the animal on which they feed chances to come that way, when they leap into activity and voracity at once. Mrs. Sharland had been laid aside on the Ray, without neighbours, and therefore without

matter of interest and objects of attack. She was now within leaping, lancing, and sucking distance of fresh life, and she rejoiced in renewed vigour, not of body, but of mind, if mind that can be called which has neither thought nor instinct, but only a certain gravitation which sets the tongue in motion. The brain of the rustic is as unlike the brain of the man of culture as the maggot is unlike the butterfly; the one is the larva of the other. They feed, live, move in different spheres; one chews cabbage, the other sips honey; one crawls on the earth, the other flies above it; one is clumsy in all its motions, the other agile; one is carnal, the other is spiritual. And yet—wondrous thought! the one is the parent of the other.

Mehalah had a great deal to do, and that work of a sort she had not been much engaged on at the Ray. No female hand had been employed at Red Hall since the death of Elijah's mother, and everything was accordingly falling out of repair and into disorder. She saw nothing of Rebow except at meals, and not always then, for he was often away with beasts at market, or at sales making purchases.

The rich marshes of Red Hall were un-

rivalled for the grazing of cattle, and the rearing of young stock.

As Mehalah was well occupied, her mind was taken off from herself, and she was for a while satisfied with her position. Rebow had not spoken to her in the manner she so disliked, and she had small occasion to speak with the men. Her mother, on the contrary, seized every occasion to entangle them in talk, or to initiate a conversation with Rebow. He maintained a surly deference towards her, and condescended at times to answer her queries and allow himself to be drawn into talk by the old woman. When that was the case, Mehalah found excuse to leave the room and engage herself in the kitchen or among the cows.

Abraham Dowsing saw much less of her than formerly. The old man, with all his sulky humour and selfish greed, had got a liking for the girl. He was much at the Ray, but often about Red Hall, where he got his food.

If he went after the sheep for the day, Mehalah provided him with 'baggings,' provision during his absence.

Lambing time was at hand, when he would be away for some weeks, returning only occasionally.

Mehalah noticed that the shepherd hesitated each time he received his food, as though he desired to speak to her, but put off the occasion. At last, one day at the beginning of February, when he was about to depart for the Ray, and would be absent some days, he said to her in a low dissatisfied tone, 'I suppose, when I come back after the lambing, you'll have been to church with him.'

'What do you mean?'

'What do I mean?' repeated Abraham, 'I mean what I say. I ain't one of those that says one thing and means another. Nobody can accuse me of that.'

'I do not understand you, Abraham.'

'There's none so dull as them that won't take,' he pursued. 'I don't hold, myself, that much good comes of going to church with a man, except this, that you fasten him, and he can't cast you off when he's tired of you.'

Mehalah flushed up.

'Abraham,' she said angrily, 'I will not allow you to speak thus to me. I understand you now, and wish I did not.'

'Oh! you do take at last! That's well. I'd act on it if I was you. A man, you see, don't

make no odds of taking up with a girl, and then when he's had a bit of her tongue and temper, he thinks he'd as lief be without her, and pick up another. He'd ring a whole change on the bells, he would, if it warn't for churches. That is my doctrine. Churches was built, and parsons were made, for tying up of men, and the girls are fools who let the men make up to them, and don't seize the opportunity to tie them.'

'Abraham, enough of this.'

'It is no odds to me. I don't care so long as I has my wittles and my wage. Only I'd rather see you mistress here than another. I'd get my wittles more regular and better, because you know me and my likings, and a new one wouldn't. That's all. Every man for himself, is my doctrine.'

'I forbid this for once and all. I am servant on wage here just as you are ; I am that, and I shall never be anything else.'

'Oh, there you think different from most folks. You don't think according to your interests ; and mistress, let me tell you, you don't talk as does the master.'

He went away mumbling something about it being no concern of his, and if some people did

not know how to eat their bread and butter when they had it in their hands it was no odds to him.

Mehalah was hurt and incensed. She went to her mother.

‘Mother,’ she said, ‘when will you be able to move? I shall look out for a situation elsewhere.’

‘What, my dear child! Move from here, where I am so comfortable! You can not. Elijah won’t hear of it. He told me so. He told me you was to remain here, and I should spend the rest of my days here in quiet. It is a very pleasant place, and more in the world than was the Ray. I am better off here than I was there. Now we get everything for nothing, we don’t lay out a penny, and you get wage beside.’

‘Mother, Abraham has been speaking to me. He has hinted, what I do not like, that I ought to marry Elijah——’

‘So you ought,’ said the widow. ‘Elijah, am sure, is willing. It is what he has been wishing and hoping for all along, but you have been so stubborn and set against him. After all he has done for us you might yield a bit.’

‘I will never marry him.’

‘Don’t say that. You will do anything to

secure a comfortable home for me. It may not be long that I may have to trouble you,—I know you look on me as a trouble, I know that but for me you would feel free, and go away into the world. You think me a burden on you, because I can do nothing ; you are young and lusty. But I bore with you, Mehalah, when you was young and feeble, and I laid by for you money that would have been very acceptable to me, and bought me many little comforts that I forebore, to save for you——’ The old woman with low cunning had discovered the thread to touch, to move her daughter.

‘Say no more, say not another word, mother,’ exclaimed Mehalah. ‘You know that I never, never will forsake you, that you are more to me a thousand times than my own life. But there is one thing I never will do for you. I never will marry Elijah.’

‘I am afraid, Mehalah, that folks will talk.’

‘I fear so too, but they have no occasion. I will show them that. I will find a situation elsewhere.’

‘You shall not, Mehalah !’

‘I must, mother.’

She thought for some time what she should

do, and then put on her bonnet, and walked into Salcott. She had not been into the village since her arrival at Red Hall.

Salcott is a small village of old cottages at the head of a creek that opens out of the Blackwater. It has a church with a handsome tower built of flints, but with no chancel. Within a bowshot, across the creek, connected with it by a bridge, is Virley church, a small hunchbacked edifice in the last stages of dilapidation, in a graveyard unhedged, unwalled; the church is scrambled over by ivy, with lattice windows bulged in by the violence of the gales, and a bellcot leaning on one side like a drunkard. Near this decaying church is a gabled farm, and this and a cottage form Virley village. The principal population congregates at Salcott, across the wooden bridge, and consisted—a hundred years ago—of labourers, and men more or less engaged in the contraband trade. Every house had its shed and stable, where was a donkey and cart, to be let on occasion to carry smuggled goods inland. At the end of the village stands a low tavern, the Rising Sun, a mass of gables; part of it, the tavern drinking-room, is only one storey high, but the rest is a jumble of roofs and lean-to buildings, chimneys, and

ovens, a miracle of picturesqueness. Mehalah walked into the bar, and found there the landlady alone.

‘I have come here, mistress,’ she said abruptly, ‘in search of work. I am strong and handy, and will do as much as a man. I will serve you faithfully and well if you will engage me. I have an infirm mother who must be lodged somewhere, so I ask for small wage.’

‘Who are you? Where do you come from?’ asked the landlady eyeing her with surprise.

‘My name is Mehalah Sharland. I lived on the Ray till the house was burned down. Since then I have been at Red Hall.’

‘Oh!’ exclaimed the woman, her countenance falling. ‘You are the young woman, are you, that I heard tell of?’

‘I am the young woman now in service there, but wanting to go and work elsewhere.’

‘I’ve heard tell of you,’ said the landlady dryly.

‘What have you heard of me?’

The woman looked knowingly at her, and smiled.

‘Pray what does Master Rebow say to your leaving him? You and he have fallen out, have

you,' said the hostess knowingly. 'You'll come together all the faster for it. There's nothing like a good breeze for running a cargo in.'

'Can you give me work?'

'I dursn't do it.'

'Have you need of anyone now?'

'Well,' with a cough, 'if Master Rebow were agreeable, I might find such a girl as you wery handy about the house. I've lost the last girl I had; she's took with the small-pox. You could have her bed, and her work, and her wage, and welcome. But unless the master gave his consent,' she began to dust the table, 'I dursn't do it.'

'Is he your landlord?'

'No, he is not.'

'Then why need you doubt about taking me?'

'Because Rebow wouldn't allow of it.'

'He could not stop me. I am not engaged to him for any time.'

'I dursn't do it. How long have you been with Rebow?'

'A little more than a month.'

'You've never gone against him perhaps. If you had, you wouldn't ask me the reason why I dursn't stand in his way.'

Mehalah considered. She had opposed Elijah from the very beginning.

‘There’s no one would dare to do it,’ continued the landlady. ‘If you want to get from Master Rebow, you must go further inland ; but I doubt if you’ll escape him. However,’ and she tossed her head, ‘you only want to make him fast. If a girl gives way at once, she’s cheap.’

‘You mistake me, you altogether mistake me,’ said Mehalah indignantly. ‘I will not remain in his house any longer ; I must and I will go elsewhere.’

‘If Elijah Rebow was to take the purse out of my pocket, or the bed from under me, if he was to take my daughter from my side, I dursn’t say nay. If you think to escape against the will of the master, you are mistaken.’

‘I shall.’

‘Look here,’ said the landlady ; ‘take my advice and go back and be mum. I won’t say another word with you, lest I get into trouble.’ She turned and left the bar.

Mehalah went out, more determined than ever to break away from Red Hall, whether her mother desired it or not.

She crossed the creaking rude wooden bridge

to Virley. The churchyard and the farmyard seemed all one. The pigs were rooting at the graves. A cow was lying in the porch. An old willow drooped over a stagnant pool beneath the chancel window. Shed roof-tiles and willow leaves lay mouldering together on the edge of the pond. The church of timber and brick, put up anyhow on older stone foundations, had warped and cracked; the windows leaned, fungus growths sprouted about the bases of the timbers. Every rib showed in the roof as on the side of a horse led to the knackers.

The farm was but little more prosperous in appearance than the church. Patched windows and broken railings showed a state of decline. Mehalah walked into the yard, where she saw a man carrying a pitchfork.

‘Who is the master here?’ she asked.

‘I am.’

‘Is there a mistress?’

‘Yes. What have you to say to her?’

Mehalah told her story as she had told it to the landlady of the Rising Sun. ‘I will work for my keep and that of my mother, and work harder than any man on your farm.’

‘Where do you come from?’

‘Red Hall.’

‘Oh!’ said the farmer, with a whistle, ‘Rebow’s girl, eh?’

‘I am working for him now.’

‘Working for him, come now that’s fine.’

‘I am working for him,’ repeated Mehalah with clouding brow.

‘And you want to come here. You think my missus would let you, do you? Now tell me, what put you on to coming to me? Has Elijah picked a quarrel with me, that he sends you here? Does he want occasion against me? Do you think I want to run any risks with my barns and my cattle and my life? No, thank you. I dursn’t do it.’

‘Tell me, where can I find work?’

‘You must go out of the reach of Rebow’s arm, if you find it.’

‘You won’t give me any?’

He shook his head. ‘For my life, I dursn’t do it.’ He laughed and put out his hand to chuck her under the chin, she struck his fingers up with her fist. ‘There ain’t a better judge of beasts in all the marshes than Rebow, nor in horse-flesh neither. You ain’t a bad bit of meat neither. I approve his taste.’

Mehalah wrenched the pitchfork out of his hand. Her eyes flamed. She would have struck him ; but was suddenly assailed from behind by the farmer's wife.

‘ Now then, hussy, what are you up to ? ’

The girl could not answer ; her anger choked the words in her throat.

‘ She's that wench of Rebow's, you know,’ said the farmer. ‘ I guess it is cat and dog in that house.’

‘ Get you gone,’ shouted the woman, ‘ go out of my premises, hussy ! I don't want my place to be frequented by such as you. Get you gone at once, or I will loose the mastiff.’

Mehalah retired with bowed head, and her arms folded on her bosom. She halted on the bridge, and kicked fragments of frozen earth and gravel into the water. A woman going by looked at her.

‘ Where is the parson ? ’ asked Mehalah.

‘ Yonder, you go over the marsh by the hill with the windmill on it, and you come to a road, you'll find a blacksmith's shop, and you must ask there. He's the curate, there's no rector hereabouts. They keep away because of the ague.’

Mehalah crossed the fen indicated, passed beside the windmill and the blacksmith's shop,

and found the cottage occupied by the curate, a poor man, married to a woman of a low class, with a family of fourteen children, packed in the house wherever they could be stowed away. The curate was a crushed man, his ideas stunned in his head by the uproar in which he dwelt. His old scholarship remained to him in his brain like fossils in the chalk, to be picked out, dead morsels. There was nothing living in the petrified white matter that filled his skull.

Mehalah knocked at the door. The parson opened it, and admitted her into his kitchen. As soon as the wife heard a female voice, she rushed out of the back kitchen with her arms covered with soap suds, and stood in the door. A little-minded woman, she lived on her jealousy, and would never allow her husband to speak with another woman if she could help it.

‘What do you want, my dear?’ asked the curate.

‘Ahem!’ coughed the wife. ‘Dear, indeed! Pray who are you, miss?’

Mehalah explained that she sought work, and hoped that the parson would be able to recommend her.

‘You don’t, you don’t——’ faltered he.

‘You don’t suppose I’d take you on here,’ said the parson’s wife. ‘You’re too young by twenty years. I don’t approve of young women; they don’t make good servants. I like a staid matronly person of forty to fifty, that one can trust, and won’t be gadding after boys or——’ she shook her suds at her husband. ‘But I don’t at present want any servant. We are full.’

‘We don’t keep any,’ said the pastor.

‘Edward! don’t demean us, we do keep servants—occasionally. You know we do, Edward. Mrs. Cutts comes in to scour out and clean up of a Saturday. You forget that. We pay her ninepence.’

‘Who are you, my dear—I mean, young woman?’ asked the curate.

‘Yes, who are you?’ said his better half. ‘We must know more of you before we can recommend you among our friends. Our friends are very select, and keep quite a better sort of servants, they don’t pick up anybody, they take so to speak the cream, the very purest quality.’

Mehalah gave the required information. Mrs. Rabbit bridled and blew bubbles. The Reverend Mr. Rabbit became depressed, yet made an effort

to be confidential. 'You'd better—you'd better marry him,' he hinted. 'It would be a satisfaction on all sides.'

'What is that? What did you say, Edward? No whisperings in my house, if you please. My house is respectable, I hope, though it mayn't be a lordly mansion. I do drive a conveyance,' she said. 'I hire the blacksmith's donkey-cart when I go out to make my calls, and drop my cards. So I leave you to infer if I'm not respectable. And, Miss—Miss—Miss—' with a giggle and a curtsy, 'when may I have the felicity of calling on you at Red Hall, and of learning how *respectable* that establishment has become? There's room for improvement,' she said, tossing her nose.

At that moment a rush, a roar, an avalanche down the narrow stairs, steep as a ladder. In a heap came the whole fourteen, the oldest foremost, the youngest in the rear.

'We've got him, we're going to drown him.'

'What is it?' feebly enquired the father, putting his hands to his ears.

'We'll hold him to the fire and pop his little eyes.'

'No, they're too small.'

'Into the water-butt with him!'

A yell.

‘He’s bitten me. Drown him!’

‘What is it?’ shouted the mother.

‘A bat. Tommy found him in the roof. We’re going to put him in the butt, and see if he can swim.’

The whole torrent swept and swirled round Mehalah, and carried her to the front door.

The curate stole out after her.

‘My good girl,’ he whispered, ‘botch it up. Marry. Most marriages hereabouts are botches.’

‘Edward!’ shouted Mrs. Rabbit, ‘come in, no sneaking outside after lasses. Come back at once. Always wanting a last word with suspicious characters.’

‘Marry!’ was the pastor’s last word, as he was drawn back by two soapy hands applied to his coat tails, and the door was slammed.

Mehalah walked away fast from the yelping throng of children congregated about the water-butt, watching the struggles of the expiring bat. She took the road before her, and saw that it led to Peldon, the leaning tower of which stood on a hill that had formed the northern horizon from the Ray. There was a nice farm by the roadside, and she went there, and was met with

excuses. The time was not one when a girl could be engaged. There was no work to be done in the winter. The early spring was coming on, she urged, and she would labour in the fields like a man. Then the sick mother was mentioned as an insuperable objection. 'We can't have any old weakly person here on the premises,' said the farmer's wife. 'You see if she was to die, you've no money, and we should be put to the expense of the burying; anyhow there'd be the inconvenience of a corpse in the house.'

Mehalah went on; and now a hope dawned in her. Another two miles would bring her to the Rose, the old inn that stood not far from the Strood. There she was known, and there she was sure, if possible, she would be accommodated and given work.

She walked forward with raised head, the dark cloud that had brooded on her brow began to rise, the bands about her heart that had been contracting gave way a little. There was the inn, an old-fashioned house, with a vine scrambling over the red tile roof, and an ancient standard sign before the door, on the green, bearing a rose, painted the size of a gigantic turnip.

Mehalah walked into the bar. The merry

landlord and his wife greeted her with delight, with many shakes of the hands, and much condolence over the disasters that had befallen her and her mother.

‘Well, my dear,’ said the landlady, confidentially, ‘you’re well out of it, if you come here. To be sure we’ll take you in, and I dare say we’ll find you work; bring your mother also. It ain’t right for a handsome wench like you to be living all along of a lone man in his farm. Folks talk. They *have* talked, and said a deal of things. But you come here. What day may we expect you?’

‘I must bring my mother by water. The tide will not suit for a week. It must be by day, my mother cannot come in the boat if there be much rain; and we shall not be able to come—at least there will be a difficulty in getting away—should Rebow be at home. Expect us some day when the weather is favourable and there be an afternoon tide.’

‘You will be sure to come?’

‘Sure.’

CHAPTER IV.

DE PROFUNDIS.

MEHALAH's heart was lighter now than it had been for many a week. She had secured her object. She could be out of the toils of Rebow, away from his hateful presence.

She had worked hard and conscientiously at Red Hall, and felt that she had to some extent cancelled the obligation he had laid on her. Her proud spirit, lately crushed, began to arise; her head was lifted instead of being bowed.

Rebow remarked the change in her, and was satisfied either that she had reconciled herself to her position, or that she meditated something which he did not understand.

Mrs. Sharland did not share in her daughter's exultation. She grumbled and protested. She was very comfortable at Red Hall, she was sure Elijah had been exceedingly kind to them. They had wanted nothing. The house was much better

than the old ramshackle Ray, and their position in it superior to any they could aspire to at the Rose. This was a hint to Mehalah, but the girl refused to take it. As for Elijah, what was there to object to in him? He was well off, very well off, a prosperous man, who spent nothing on himself, and turned over a great deal of money in the year. He was not very young, but he was a man who had seen the world and was in his prime of strength and intelligence. Mrs. Sharland thought that they could not do better than settle at the Red Hall and make it their home for life, and that Mehalah should put her foolish fancies in her pocket and make the best of what offered.

But Mehalah's determination bore down all opposition.

St. Valentine's Day shone bright with a promise of spring. The grey owls were beginning to build in the hayrick, the catkins were timidly swelling on the nut bushes; in the ooze the glasswort shot up like little spikes of vitriol-green glass. A soft air full of wooing swept over the flats. The sun was hot.

The tide flowed at noon, and Elijah was absent.

Mehalah, deaf to her mother's remonstrances,

removed some of their needful articles to the boat, and at last led her mother, well wrapped up, to the skiff.

When the girl had cast loose, and was rowing on the sparkling water, her heart danced and twinkled with the wavelets; there was a return of spring to her weary spirit, and the good and generous seeds in her uncultivated soul swelled and promised to shoot. She was proud to think that she had carried her point, that in spite of Rebow, she had established her freedom, that her will had proved its power of resistance. She even sang as she rowed, she,—whose song had been hushed since the disappearance of George. She had not forgotten him, and cast away her grief at his loss, but the recoil from the bondage and moral depression of Red Hall filled her with transient exultation and joyousness.

The row was long.

‘O mother!’ she said, as she passed under the Ray hill, ‘I must indeed run up and look at the place. I cannot go by.’

‘Do as you will,’ said Mrs. Sharland. ‘I cannot control you. I don’t pretend to. My wishes and my feelings are nothing to you.’

Mehalah did not notice this peevish remark,

she was accustomed to her mother's fretfulness. She threw the little anchor on the gravel at the 'hard,' and jumped on shore. She ascended the hill and stood by the scorched black patch which marked her old home. The house had burned to the last stick, leaving two brick chimneys standing gauntly alone. There was the old hearth at which she had so often crouched, bare, cold and open. A few bricks had been blown from the top of the chimney, but otherwise it was intact.

As she stood looking sadly on the relics, Abraham Dowsing came up.

'What are you doing here?'

'I have come away from Red Hall, Abraham,' she said gaily, 'I do not think I have been so happy for many a day.'

'When are you going back?'

'Never.'

'Who then is to prepare me my wittles?' he asked sullenly. 'I ain't going to be put off with anything.'

'I do not know, Abraham.'

'But I must know. Now go back again, and don't do what's wrong and foolish. You ought to be there, and mistress there too. Then all will run smooth, and I'll get my wittles as I like them.'

‘You need not speak of that, Abraham, I shall never return to Red Hall. I have quitted it and I hope have seen the last of the hateful house and its still more hateful master.’

‘I wonder,’ mused the shepherd, ‘whether I could arrange with Rebow to get my wittles from the Rose.’

‘That is where I am going to.’

‘Oh!’ his face lightened, ‘then I don’t mind. Do what you think best.’ His face darkened again, ‘But I doubt whether the master will keep me on when you have left. I reckon he only takes me because of you; he thinks you wouldn’t like it, if I was to be turned adrift. No. You had better go back to Red Hall. Make yourself as comfortable as you can. That’s my doctrine.’

Presently the old man asked, ‘I say, does the master know you have left?’

‘No, Abraham.’

‘Are you sure?’

‘I never told him.’

‘Did your mother know you had made up your mind to leave?’

‘Yes, I told her so a week ago.’

‘And you suppose she has kept her mouth shut? She couldn’t do it.’

‘If Elijah had suspected we were going to-day,’ said Mehalah, ‘I do not think he would have left home; he would have endeavoured to prevent me.’

‘Perhaps. But he’s deep.’

‘Good day, Abraham!’ She waved him a farewell with a smile. She knew, and made allowance for the humours of the old man. In a moment she was again by her mother, at the oar, and speeding with the flowing tide up the Rhyn to the ‘hard’ at its head belonging to the Rose Inn.

‘Have you brought the toad jug with you, Mehalah?’

‘No, mother.’

‘Nor the china dogs?’

‘No, mother.’

‘It is of no use, I will not live at the Rose. I will not get out of the boat. I must have all my property about me.’

‘I will fetch the other things away. When you are housed safely, then I shall not care. I will go back and bring away all our goods.’

‘You are so rough. I won’t let anyone handle the china but myself. Last time the poodles were moved, you know one lost a ear and a bit of its tail. There is no one fit to touch such things but me. Those rough-handed fellows, Jim and Joe,

what do they know of the value of those dogs? You will promise me, Mehalah, to be gentle with them. Put them in the foot of a pair of stockings and wrap the legs round them, and then perhaps they will travel. I wouldn't have them lose any more of their precious persons,—no, not for worlds,—not for worlds.'

'I will take heed, mother.'

'And mind and stuff my old nightcap,—the dirty one, I mean—and my bedsocks into the toad jug, then it won't break. You'll promise me that, won't you; if that were injured, I'd as soon die as see it.'

'I will use the utmost precaution with it.'

'Then there are the soup plates, of Lowestoft. I had them of my father, and he had them of his grandmother; there's a dozen of them, and not a chip or a crack. True beauties as ever you saw, I think you'd best put them in the folds of some of my linen. Put them between the sheets, wide apart, in the spruce hutch.'

'All right, mother; now hold hard, here we are.'

The boat grated on the bottom, and then it was drawn up by a firm hand. Mehalah looked round and started.

Elijah and two other men were there. Elijah had stepped into the water, and pulled the boat ashore.

‘Here we are, Glory!’ he said, ‘waiting ready for you. The sheriff’s officer with his warrant, all ready. You haven’t kept us waiting long.’

‘What is that? What is that?’ screamed Mrs. Sharland.

‘Step out, Glory! step out, mistress!’ said Elijah.

‘What is the meaning of this?’ asked Mehalah, a cloud suddenly darkening her sky and quenching the joy of her heart.

‘I’ve a warrant against you, madam,’ said the man who stood by Rebow. ‘Please to read it.’ He held it out.

‘What is this?’ screamed Mrs. Sharland, rising in the boat and staggering forwards. Mehalah helped her on shore.

‘This is what it is,’ answered Rebow. ‘You and Glory there are my tenants for the Ray. The farm is mine, with the marshes and the saltings. I gave eight hundred pounds for it. You’ve burnt down my premises, between you, you and Glory there. You’ve robbed me of a hundred or two hundred pounds worth of property

with your wilfulness or carelessness. Now, I want to know, how is it you have not built up my farmhouse again?’

‘I can’t do it. I haven’t the money!’ wailed Mrs. Sharland. ‘I am sure, Master Rebow, there was nothing but pure accident in the fire. I never thought——’

‘Pure accident!’ scoffed Elijah. ‘Do you call that pure accident, soaking the whole chamber in spirits, with a fire burning on the hearth, and dashing the cask staves here and there, on the fire and off it.’

Mehalah looked at him.

‘Ah, ha! Glory! You think I don’t know it. You think I didn’t see you! Why, I was at the window. I saw you do it. Tell me, mother, did not Glory smash the keg I had just given you?’

‘I believe she did, Elijah! I am very sorry. I did my best to stop her, but she is a perverse, rebellious girl. You must forgive her, she intended no harm.’

‘If you saw me do it, why did you let the house catch fire?’ asked Mehalah, looking hard in Rebow’s face.

‘Could I help it?’ he asked in reply. ‘There you sat by the hearth, and no harm came of it.

At last you went out, and locked and double-locked the door. I went down to my boat. I tell you, I was uneasy, and I looked back, and I saw by the light in the room that the spirit had caught. I ran back and tried to get in. The floor was flaming.'

'The floor was of brick,' said Mehalah.

'The door was fast locked. You know best why you locked it. It never was fastened before that night. You screwed on the lock, then you went out of the place yourself, leaving the room on fire, and fastened the door that none might get in.'

'A lie!' exclaimed the girl.

'Is it a lie? I don't think it. I can't cipher out your doings any other way. I tried to break open the door, but you had put too stout a fastening on. Then I burst open the window, and when the wind got in, it made the fire rage worse. So I ran and shouted to my men in the big boat, and I got a balk and I stove the door in, and then it was too late to do more than save your mother and her goods. As for you, you left her and them to burn together; you wanted to be off and free of her. I know you.'

'Oh, Master Rebow! I know I'm a burden

to her, but she would not do that!' put in Mrs. Sharland.

'Why did you watch me?' asked Mehalah, and then regretted that she had put the question.

'You see,' said Elijah turning to the officer, 'she didn't think anyone was near to give evidence against her.'

'Here I am,' said Mehalah, 'put me in prison, do with me what you will. I am innocent of all intent to burn the farm.'

'I could hang you for it,' laughed Elijah. 'That pretty neck where the red handkerchief hangs so jauntily would not look well with a hemp rope round it. You'd dangle on the Ray, where the house stood. You'd have a black cap then pulled over those dark eyes and brown skin, not a red one, not a red one, Glory!' he rubbed his hands.

'I have no warrant against you,' said the bailiff to Mehalah. 'You stand charged with nothing. The warrant is against your mother.'

'Against me? What will you do with me?' cried the old woman.

'You must go to prison if you cannot build the house up again, and restore it as good as it

was to the landlord. He can't be at a loss by your neglect.'

'I cannot do it. I have not the money.'

'Then you must go to prison till you get it.'

Mrs. Sharland sank on the gravel. She wept and wrung her hands. This was worse than the burning of the house, worse even than the lesion of the ear and tail of the poodle.

'I won't go. I can't go!' she sobbed. 'I've the ague so bad. I suffer from rheumatism in all my bones. Let me alone,' she pleaded, 'and I promise I'll go to bed and never get out of it again.'

'You'll suffer in prison, I can promise you,' said Elijah exultingly. 'You'll have no bed to crawl into, unless you can pay for it; you'll have no blankets to wrap round you in the cold frosty night, if you can't pay for them; you'll have no fire to shiver by when there is ice on the ponds, if you haven't money to pay for it. The frost in your bones will make you shriek and jabber in prison.'

'I have no money. I gave the last to pay off Mrs. De Witt,' wailed the wretched woman. 'But there are the sheep.'

'They go to pay your rent up to Lady Day,

aye, and till Michaelmas. I haven't had notice yet that you are about to quit. You can't give up the farm without, and I will exact every penny of my rent.'

'Then I am at your mercy,' sobbed Mrs. Sharland. She turned to Mehalah and pleaded, 'Haven't you a word to say, to save me?'

The girl was silent. What could she say?

'Come along, madam, it is of no use. The warrant is here, and come along you must.'

'I will not go to prison. I will not! I shall die of cold and ague and rheumatics there. My bones will burst like water-pipes, and I'll shiver the teeth out of my jaws and the nails off my fingers and toes. I won't go!' she screamed. 'You must carry me, I can't walk. I'm a dying old woman.'

'Would you like to go back to Red Hall?' asked Elijah gravely.

'Oh! Master Rebow, if I might! I could shiver in comfort.'

'You and Glory! You and Glory!' He looked from one to the other. 'I don't take back one without the other.'

'Take me back!' wailed Mrs. Sharland. 'I know you won't be so cruel as to send me to

prison. Let me go back to my armchair; Mehalah! promise him everything.'

'I will promise him nothing,' she said gloomily. 'If ever I hated this man, I hate him now.'

'Then she must go to prison,' growled Rebow. 'Now look you here, Glory! I don't ask much. I only ask you to go back with your mother, and work for me as you have worked hitherto. I do not say a word about anything else. You thought to escape me. You cannot. I have told you all along that it is impossible. As for the future, let the future determine. I wish to let you take your own course. I will not say another word about my wishes, till you come to me, of your own accord, and say that you will be mine. There! I promise you that. I will not force you any further; but I will not allow you to leave my house. There you must remain till you come to me and bid me take you, till you come and give yourself freely into my hands. Do you hear me, Glory?'

'Mehalah, save me,' pleaded Mrs. Sharland. 'Do what you can to save me from prison. Did I not lay by for you when I was a widow and needy? And will you refuse me this?'

‘One thing or another,’ said Rebow. ‘Either your mother rots in prison, with no escape possible till she goes out to her grave in a pauper’s shell, or you and she return at once to Red Hall, on the same conditions as you have been there hitherto, on the conditions you proposed yourself.’

Mehalah trembled.

‘Let us go back,’ said Mrs. Sharland. ‘Help me into the boat. He couldn’t have spoken more fair. You see, Mehalah, the Ray house is a great loss to him, and he gave eight hundred pounds for it.’

‘And the marshes, and the saltings, and for you and Glory, and all things,’ put in Rebow.

Mehalah held out her arms. Her head swam, she stood as though balancing herself on a high wall. Then she clasped her hands over her forehead, and burst into a storm of tears.

‘Jim!’ said Elijah, ‘get the old doll into the stern, and you row her back to Red Hall. Take her under your arm and chuck her in anyhow.’

He looked at the convulsed girl with an ugly smile of triumph.

‘Give me the warrant, bailiff!’ He took the paper, held it under Mehalah’s eyes and tore it in pieces, and scattered them over the water.

‘Shove off, Jim. Row the old bundle back quick. Glory and I are going to drive home.’

Mehalah looked up, with a gasp as though stung.

‘Yes, Glory! To-day is Valentine’s Day. Valentine’s Day it is. I have my little gig here. It accommodates two beautifully. I am going to take you up by my side, and drive you home, *home*, to your home and mine, Glory, in it; and all along the road, here at the Rose where the horse is standing, at Peldon, at Salcott and Virley,—all along the road,—at the parson’s, at the Rising Sun, at Farmer Goppin’s,—everywhere I’ll let them see that I’m out a-junketing to-day along with my Valentine.’

All power of resistance was gone from Mehalah. The landlady at the Rose looked at her with pitying eyes, as she was helped up into the gig.

‘I thought you was coming to us,’ said the woman.

‘You thought wrong,’ answered Elijah with a boisterous laugh. ‘Glory is coming back to me. We’ve had a bit of a tiff, but have made it up. Haven’t we, Glory?’

The girl’s head fell in shame on her bosom.

She could not speak, but the tears rolled out of her eyes and streaked the 'Gloriana' on her breast.

He did not say a word to her, as he drove home ; but he stopped wherever she had halted a few days before. At Peldon farm he drew up, and struck at the door. He asked if there was a bullock there to be sold. The woman came into the garden with him.

'Out a Valentining along with my lass,' he said, indicating Mehalah with his whip over his shoulder.

He arrested his horse at the parson's cottage, and shouted till the door opened, and Mr. Rabbit appeared, with Mrs. Rabbit behind his back, peeping over his shoulder.

'I say,' roared Rebow, 'one of those cursed brats of yours has been on my marshes plaguing my cows, and has run two of them lame. Let him try it on again, let him put his foot on my ground, and I'll cut it off, and send him limping home.'

He stopped at the Rising Sun and called for spirits, and offered some to Mehalah. She turned aside her head in disgust ; he drove up to Virley Hall farm, and into the yard and called forth Farmer Goppin and his wife.

‘I tell you,’ he said, ‘one of my cattle has been straying, I don’t suppose she has done damage; she got into this here yard, I’m told. You turned her out. I’m a man of few words, but I thank ye. I am carrying her home before she is pounded.’

And then he drove straight to Red Hall.

Mehalah descended, crushed, broken, no more herself, the bold haughty girl of the Ray. She crept upstairs, took off her red cap and tore it with her hands and teeth. Her liberty was for ever gone from her.

Her mother was in their common bedroom, the boat had returned before the cart, for the way by water was the shortest, and tide had favoured. The old woman babbled about her grievances, and rejoiced at Rebow’s magnanimity. She was busy replacing all the little articles that had been carried away, and were now brought back.

Mehalah could not endure the thrumming of her talk, and she hid herself in a corner of the little inner apartment, an empty room lighted by a small triangular window. There she crouched in the corner, on the ground, with her head on her knees and her hands in her hair behind. She sat there motionless. The fountain of her tears

was dried up. The hectic flames burned in her cheeks, but all the rest of her face was deadly in its palor. She could not think, she could not feel. She had experienced but one such another period of agony, that when the medal was restored and she knew that George was lost to her. That moment was sweet to this. That was one of pure pain, this of pain and humiliation, of crushed pride, of honour trampled and dragged in the dirt. Her self-respect had had its death-wound, and she sat and let her heart bleed away. Once or twice she put her hand on the floor. She thought that that must have been flooded with blood and tears, as if, when she took her hand up, it must be steeped red. It was not so.

But the soul has its ichor as well as the heart, and when it is cut deep into, it also drains away, and is left empty, pulseless, pallid. Mrs. Sharland came in and spoke to her daughter, but got no answer. Mehalah looked up at her, but there was no expression in her eyes, she did not hear, or if she heard, did not understand what was said to her. The old woman went away muttering.

The evening fell, and Mehalah still sat crouched in her corner. The golden triangle which had stood on the wall opposite her had moved to her

side, turned to silver, and now was but a nebulous patch on the white plaster. With the death of the day some abatement came to Mehalah's distress. She moved her cramped limbs. She rose to her knees, and fixed her eyes on the sky that glimmered grey through the triangular window. A star was hanging there. She saw it, and looked at it long, it shone through her eyes and down into the dark abyss in her soul. By little her ideas began to shape themselves; recollections of the past formed over that despairing gulf; she could not think of the present; she had not the power or the will to look into the future.

A year had passed since, on such an evening as this, looking on that star, she had stood with George De Witt on the Ray beneath the thorn trees, and he had gaily called her his Valentine, and given her in jest a picture of the Goddess of Liberty as proclaimed in Paris, wearing the *bonnet rouge*. She a goddess! She who was now so weak. Her power was gone. Liberty! She had none. She was a slave.

She drew herself up on her knees, and strained her united fingers, with the palms outward, towards that glittering star, and moaned, 'My Valentine! My George, my George!'

Suddenly, as if in answer to that wail from her wounded heart, there came a crash, and then loud, pealing, agonising, a cry from below out of the depths, and yet in the air about—‘Glory ! Glory ! Glory !’

CHAPTER V.

IN PROFUNDUM.

THE cry roused Mehalah, as a step into cold water is a shock bringing a somnambulist instantly to full consciousness.

In a minute she was outside the house, looking for the person whose appeal had struck her ear. She saw the wooden shutter that had closed the window of the madman's den broken, hanging by one hinge. Two bleached, ghostly hands were stretched through the bars, clutching and opening.

At his door, above the steps, stood Elijah.

‘Hah! Glory!’ he said, ‘has the crazed fool’s shout brought you down?’

She was stepping towards the window. Rebow ran down before her.

‘Go in!’ he shouted to his brother. ‘Curse you, you fool! breaking the shutter and yelling

out, scaring the whole house.' He had a whip, a great carter's whip, in his hand, and he smacked it. The hands disappeared instantly.

'Bring me a hammer and nails,' ordered Rebow. 'You will find them in the window of the hall.'

Mehalah obeyed. Rebow patched up the shutter temporarily. There were iron bars to the window. The wooden cover had a small hole in it to admit a little light. During the summer the shutter was removed. It was used to exclude the winter cold.

'Why did he call me?' asked Mehalah.

'He did not.'

'I heard his cry. He called me thrice, Glory! Glory! Glory!'

'He was asking for his victuals,' said Rebow, with a laugh. 'Look you here, Glory! I have been alone in this house so long, and have thought of you, and brooded on you, and had none to speak to about you. At last I took to teaching my brother your name. I wouldn't give him his food till he said it. I taught him like a parrot. I made him speak your name, as you make a dog sit up and beg for a bit of bread. I've been about on the road all day, on account of your

perversity and wilfulness, and so forgot to give my brother his food. But I don't care. He had no right to smash the shutter and yell out the way he has. I'll punish him for it. I'll lay into him with the whip, so as he shall not forget. He'll be quieter in future.'

'Do not,' said Mehalah. 'It is a shame; it is wicked to treat a poor afflicted wretch thus.'

'Oh! you are turned advocate, are you? You take the side of a madman against the sane. That is like a perverse creature such as you. What has he done for you, that you should try to save his back?'

'No mercy is to be looked for at your hands,' said Mehalah sullenly.

'Look you here, Glory! the moon is full, and that always makes him madder. I have to keep him short of food, and strap his shoulders, or he would tear the walls down in his fury.'

'Let me attend to him,' asked Mehalah.

'You'd be afraid of him.'

'I should pity him,' said the girl. 'He and I are both wretched, both your victims, both prisoners, wearing your chains.'

'You have no chains round you, Glory.'

'Have I not? I have, invisible, may be, but

firmer, colder, more given to rust into and rub the flesh than those carried by that poor captive. I have tried to break away, but I cannot. You draw me back.'

'I told you I could. I have threads to every finger, and I can move you as I will. I can bring you into my arms.'

'That—never,' said Mehalah gloomily and leisurely.

'You think not?'

'I am sure not. You may boast of your power over me. You have a power over me, but that power has its limits. I submit now, but only for my mother's sake. Were she not dependent wholly on me, were she dead, I would defy you and be free, free as the gull yonder.'

Elijah put his hand inside his door, drew out his gun, and in a moment the gull was seen to fall.

'She is not dead,' said Mehalah, with a gleam of triumph in her sad face.

'No, but winged. The wretch will flutter along disabled. She will try to rise, and each effort will give her mortal agony, and grind the splintered bones together and make the blood bleed away. She will skim a little while above

the water, but at length will fall into the waves and be washed ashore dead.'

'Yes,' said Mehalah; 'you will not kill, but wound—wound to the quick.'

'That is about it, Glory!'

'Let me repeat my request,' she said; 'allow me to attend to your brother. I must have some one, some thing, to pity and minister to.'

'You can minister to me.'

'So I do.'

'And you can pity me.'

'Pity you!' with scorn.

'Aye. I am to be pitied, for here am I doing all I can to win the heart of a perverse and stubborn girl, and I meet with nothing but contempt and hate. I am to be pitied. I am a man; I love you, and am defied and repulsed, and fled from as though I had the pestilence, and my house were a plague hospital.'

'Will you let me attend to your brother?'

'No, I will not.'

The shutter was dashed off its hinges, flung out into the yard, and the two ghastly hands were again seen strained through the bars. Again there rang out in the gathering night the piteous cry, 'Glory! Glory! Glory!'

‘By God! you hound,’ yelled Elijah, and he raised his whip to bring it down in all its cutting force on the white wrists.

‘I cannot bear it. I will not endure it!’ cried Mehalah, and she arrested the blow. She caught the stick and wrenched it out of the hand of Rebow before he could recover from his surprise, and broke it over her knee and flung it into the dyke that encircled the yard. There was, however, no passion in her face, she acted deliberately, and her brown cheek remained unflushed. ‘I take his cry as an appeal to me, and I will protect him from your brutality.’

‘You are civil,’ sneered Elijah. ‘What are you in this house? A servant, you say. Then you should speak and act as one. No, Glory! you know you are not, and cannot be, a servant. You shall be its mistress. I forgive you what you have done, for you are asserting your place and authority. Only do not cry out and protest if in future I speak to the workmen of you as the mistress.’

A hard expression settled on Mehalah’s brow and eyes. She turned away.

‘Are you going? Have you not a parting word, mistress?’

‘Go!’ she said, in a tone unlike that usual with her. ‘I care for nothing. I feel for no one. I am without a heart. Do what you will with that brother of yours. I am indifferent to him and to his fate. Everything in the world is all one to me now. If you had let me think for the poor creature and feed him, and attend to him, I might have become reconciled to being here; I could at least have comforted my soul with the thought that I was ministering to the welfare of one unhappy wretch and lightening his lot. But now,’ she shrugged her shoulders. ‘Now everything is all one to me. I can laugh,’ she did so, harshly. ‘There is nothing in the world that I care for now, except my mother, and I do not know that I care very much for her, now. I feel as if I had no heart, or that mine were frozen in my bosom.’

‘You do not care now for your mother!’ exclaimed Rebow. ‘Then leave her here to my tender mercy, and go out into the world and seek your fortune. Go on the tramp like your gipsy ancestry.’

‘Leave my mother to your mercy!’ echoed Mehalah! ‘To the mercy of *you*, who could cut your poor crazed brother over the fingers with a

great horsewhip! To *you*, who have stung and stabbed at my self-respect till it is stupefied; who have treated me, whom you profess to love, as I would not treat a marsh briar.¹ Never. Though my heart may be stunned or dead, yet I have sufficient instinct to stand by and protect her who brought me into the world and nursed me, when I was helpless. As for you, I do not hate you any more than I love you. You are nothing to me but a coarse, ill-conditioned dog. I will beat you off with a hedgestake if you approach me nearer than I choose. If you keep your distance and keep to yourself, you will not occupy a corner of my thoughts. I take my course, you take yours.' She walked moodily away and regained her room.

Mrs. Sharland began at once a string of queries. She wanted to know who had cried out and alarmed them, what Mehalah had been saying to Rebow, whether she had come to her senses at last, how long she was going to sulk, and so on.

Mehalah answered her shortly and rudely; that the cry had come from the madman, that he meant nothing by it, he had been taught to yell thus when he wanted food, that he had been

¹ Horse-fly.

neglected by his brother and was distressed ; as for her mother's other questions, she passed them by without remark, and brushing in front of the old woman, went into the inner chamber.

‘Mehalah !’ called Mrs. Sharland. ‘I will not have you glouting in there any longer. Come out.’

The girl paid no attention to her. She leaned her head against the wall and put her hands to her ears. Her mother's voice irritated her. She wanted quiet.

‘This is too much of a good thing,’ said the old woman, going in after her. ‘Come away, Mehalah, you have your work to do, and it must be done.’

‘You are right,’ answered the girl in a hard tone, ‘I am a servant, and I will do my work. I will go down at once.’ She knitted her brows, and set her teeth. Her complexion was dull and dead. Her hair was in disorder, and fell about her shoulders. She twisted it up carelessly, and tied it round her head with George's handkerchief.

When she returned, her mother was in bed, and half-asleep. Mehalah went to the window, the window that looked towards the Ray, and drawing the curtains behind her, remained there, her head sunk, but her eyes never wavering from

the point where her home had been when she was happy, her heart free, and her self-respect unmangled. So passed hour after hour. There was full moon, but the sky was covered with clouds white as curd, scudding before a north-west wind. The moon was dulled but hardly obscured every now and then, and next moment glared out in naked brilliancy.

Everything in the house was hushed. Elijah had gone to bed. Mehalah had heard his heavy tread on the stair, and the bang of his door as he shut it; it had roused her, she turned her head, and her face grew harder in the cold moonlight. Then she looked back towards the Ray.

Her mother was asleep. The starlings and sparrows who had worked their way under the eaves, and were building nests between the ceiling and the tiles, stirred uneasily; they were cold and hungry and could not sleep. Anyone not knowing what stirred would have supposed that mice were holding revel in the attics. There yonder on the marsh was something very white, like paper, flapping and flashing in the moonlight. What could it be? It moved a little way, then blew up and fell and flapped again. Was it a sheet of paper? If so how came it not to be

swept away by the rushing wind. No, it was no sheet of paper. Mehalah's curiosity was roused. She opened the window and looked out. At the same moment it rose, fluttered nearer, eddied up, and fell again. A cloud drifted over the moon and made the marsh grey, and in the shadow the restless object was lost, the flash of white was blotted over. When the moon gleamed out again, she saw it once more. It did not move. The wind tore by, and shook the casement in her hand, but did not lift and blow away that white object. Then there was a lull. The air was still for a moment. At that moment the white object moved again, rose once more and fluttered up, it was flying, it was nearing,—it fell on the roof of the bakehouse under the window. Now Mehalah saw what this was. It was the wounded gull, the bird Rebow had shot.

The miserable creature was struggling with a broken wing, and with distilling blood, to escape to sea, to die, and drop into the dark, tossing, foaming waves, to lose itself in infinity. It could not expire on the land, it must seek its native element, the untamed, unconfined sea; it could not give forth its soul on the trampled, reclaimed, hedged-in earth.

Was it not so with Glory? Could her free soul rest where she now was? Could it endure for ever this tyranny of confinement within impalpable walls? She who had lived, free as a bird, to be blown here and there by every impulse, when every impulse was fresh and pure as the unpolluted breath of God that rushes over the ocean. Was she not wounded by the same hand that had brought down the white mew? There she was fluttering, rising a little, again falling, her heart dim with tears, her life's vigour bleeding away, the white of her bosom smeared with soil that adhered, as she draggled in the mire, into which he had cast her. Whither was she tending? She turned her face out to sea—it lay stretched before her ink-black. Red Hall and its marshes were to her a prison, and freedom was beyond its seawall.

She was startled by a sound as of bricks falling. She listened without curiosity. The sound recurred again, and was followed after a while by a grating noise, and then a rattle as of iron thrown down. She heard nothing further for a few minutes, and sank back into her dull dream, and watching of the poor mew, that now beat its wings on the roof, and then slid off and

disappeared. Was it dead now? It did not matter. Mehalah could not care greatly for a bird. But presently from out of the shadow of the bakehouse floated a few white feathers. The gull was still wending its way on, with unerring instinct, towards the rolling sea. Just then Mehalah heard a thud, as though some heavy body had fallen, accompanied by a short clank of metal. She would have paid it no further attention had she not been roused by seeing the madman striding and then jumping, with the chain wound round one arm. He looked up at the moon, his matted hair was over his face, and Mehalah could not distinguish the features. He ran across the yard, and then leaped the dyke and went off at long bounds, like a kangaroo, over the pasture towards the sea-wall.

Mehalah drew back. What should she do? Should she rouse Elijah, and tell him that his brother had wrenched off the grating of his window and worked his way out, and was now at large in the glare of moon on the marshes, leaping and rejoicing in his freedom? No, she would not. Let the poor creature taste of liberty, inhale the fresh, pure air, caper and race about under no canopy but that of God's making.

She would not curtail his time of freedom by an hour. He would suffer severely for his evasion on the morrow, when Elijah would call out his men, and they would hunt the poor wretch down like a wild beast. She could see Rebow stand over him with his great dog-whip, and strike him without mercy. She rouse Rebow! She consign the maniac to his dark dungeon, with its dank floor and stifling atmosphere! The gull was forgotten now; its little strivings overlooked in anxiety for the mightier strivings of the human sufferer. Yet all these three were bound together by a common tie! Each was straining for the infinite, and for escape from thralldom; one with a broken wing, one with a broken brain, one with a broken heart. There was the wounded bird flapping and edging its way outwards to the salt sea. There was the dazed brain driving the wretched man in mad gambols along the wall to the open water. There was the bruised soul of the miserable girl yearning for something, she knew not what, wide, deep, eternal, unlimited, as the all-embracing ocean. In that the bird, the man, the maid sought freedom, rest, recovery.

She could not go to bed and leave the poor maniac thus wandering unwatched. She would

go out and follow him, and see that no harm came to him.

She took off her shoes, shut the window. Her mother was sleeping soundly. She undid the door and descended the stairs. They creaked beneath her steps, but Rebow, who had slept through the noise made by his brother in effecting his escape, was not awakened by her footfall. She unlocked the back door, closed it, and stole forth.

As she passed the bakehouse she lit on the wounded bird. In a spasm of sympathy she bent and took it up. It made a frantic effort to escape, and uttered its wild, harsh screams; but she folded her hands over the wings and held the bird to her bosom and went on. The blood from the broken bone and torn flesh wet her hand, and dried on it like glue. She heeded it not, but walked forward. By the raw moonlight she saw the madman on the wall. He had thrown down his chain. He heeded it not now. There had been sufficient intelligence or cunning in his brain to bid him deaden its clanking when making his escape from the house.

He sprang into the air and waved his arms; his wild hair blew about in the wind, it looked

like seaweed tangles. Then he sat down. Mehalah did not venture on the wall, but crept along in the marsh. He had got a stone, and was beating at his chain with it upon the stone casing of the wall on the sea face. He worked at it patiently for an hour, and at last broke one of the links. He waved the chain above his head with a shout, and flung it behind him into the marsh. He ran on. Mehalah stole after him. He never looked back, always forwards or upwards. Sometimes he danced and shouted and sang snatches to the moon when it flared out from behind a cloud. Once, when at a bend of the wall, his shadow was cast before him, he cowered back from it, jabbering, and putting his hands supplicatingly towards it; then he slipped down the bank, laughed, and ran across the marsh, with his shadow behind him, and thought in his bewildered brain that he had cunningly eluded and escaped the figure that stood before him to stop him. He reached the mill that worked the pump. He must have remembered it: it was mixed up somehow with the confused recollections in his brain, for it did not seem to startle or frighten him. He scarcely noticed it, but, uttering a howl, a wild, triumphant shout,

sprang upon a duck punt hauled up on the wall. It was Elijah's punt, left there occasionally, quite as often as at the landing near the house, a small, flat-bottomed boat, painted white, with a pair of white, muffled oars laid in it.

In a moment, before Mehalah had considered what to do, or whether she could do anything, he had run the punt down into the water, and had seated himself in it, and taken the oars and struck out to sea, out towards the open, towards the unbounded horizon.

He rowed a little way, not very far, and then stood up. He could not apparently endure to face the land, the place of long confinement, he must turn and look out to sea.

Mehalah stood on the sea wall. The waves were lapping at her feet. The tide had turned. It flowed at midnight, and midnight was just past. She had forgotten the gull she bore, in her alarm for the man, she opened her arms, and the bird fluttered down and fell into the water.

The moon was now swimming in a clear space of sky free of cloudfloes. In that great light the man was distinctly visible, standing, waving his arms in the white punt, drifting, not rapidly, but steadily outwards. In that great light went out

also, on the same cold, dark water, the dying bird, that now stirred not a wing.

Mehalah watched motionless, with a yearning in her heart that she could not understand, her arms extended towards that boundless expanse towards which the man and the bird were being borne, and into which they were fading. He was singing ! Some old, childish lay of days that were happy, before the shadow fell.

There stood Glory, looking, indistinctly longing, till her eyes were filled with tears. She looked on through the watery vail, but saw nothing. When she wiped it away she saw nothing. She watched till the day broke, but she saw nothing more.

CHAPTER VI.

IN VAIN !

MRS. DE WITT was not happy, taken all in all. There were moments indeed of conviviality when she boasted that she was now what she had always wanted to be, independent, and with none to care for but herself, 'none of them bullet-headed, shark-bellied men to fuss and worrit about.' But she laboured, like the moon, under the doom of passing through phases, and one of these was dark and despondent. As she lay in her bunk of a raw morning, and contemplated her toes in the grey light that fell through the hatches, she was forced to admit that her financial position was not established on a secure basis. It reposed on smelt, shrimps, dabs and eels, a fluctuating, an uncertain foundation. She strode about the island and the nearest villages on the mainland, with a basket on her arm, containing a half-pint measure, and a load of shrimps, or swung a stick in her hand from which

depended slimy eels. She did a small trade at the farm-houses, and reaped some small retail profits. The farmers' wives were accustomed to see her in sunshine habited in scarlet more or less mottled with crimson, in storm wearing a long grey military great coat. In summer a flapping straw hat adorned her head; in winter a fur cap with a great nob at the top, and fur lappets over her ears. In compliment to her condition of mourner a big black bow was sown to the summit of the nob, and she looked like a knight helmeted, bearing as crest a butterfly displayed, sable. It was seldom that she was dismissed from a farmhouse without having disposed of a few shrimps, or some little fish; for if she were not given custom regularly, she took huff and would not call with her basket again, till an apology were offered, and she was entreated to return.

The profits of the trade were not however considerable, and such as they were underwent reduction on all her rounds. She consumed the major part of them in her orbit at the 'Fountain,' the 'Fox,' the 'Leather Bottle' or the 'Dog and Pheasant.' In the bar of each of these ancient taverns, Mrs. De Witt was expected and greeted as cordially as at the farm kitchen. There she

was wont to uncasque, and ruffle out her white cap, and turn out her pockets to count her brass. There also this brass underwent considerable diminution. The consumption of her profits generally left Mrs. De Witt in a condition rather the worse than the better. She was a sinking fund that sucked in her capital. However cheery of face, and crisp of gathers, Mrs. De Witt may have started on her mercantile round, the close saw her thick of speech, leery of eye, festoon of walk, vague in her calculations, reckless of measurement with her little pewter half-pint, and generally crumpled in cap and garment. If she were still able to rattle a few coppers in her pocket when she stumbled up the ladder, toppled down into the hold, and tumbled into her bunk, she was happy. She was her own mistress, she had no helpless, foolish man, husband or son, to consider, and before whom to veil her indiscretions; she pulled up the ladder as soon as she was home; and, as she said, sat up for no one but herself.

She had not quite reconciled her smoking to her conscience, when she had a son to set a model of life to, before whom to posture as the ideal of womanhood and maternity; then when his foot was heard on the ladder she would slip her clay into

the oven, and murmur something about a pinch out of her snuff-box having fallen on the stove, or about her having smoked her best gown as a preventive to moth. Now she smoked with composure, and turned over in her mind the various possibilities that lay before her. Should she bow to the hard necessity of leading about a tame man again, or should she remain in her present condition of absolute freedom? The five and twenty pounds had nearly disappeared, and she was not certain that she could live in comfort on her gains by the trade in shrimps and eels.

Mrs. De Witt was a moralist, and when nearly drunk religious. She was not a church-goer, but she was fond of convivial piety. Over her cups she had a great deal to say of her neighbours' moral shortcomings and of her own religious emotions. When in a state of liquor she was always satisfied that she was in a state of grace. In her sober hours she thought of nothing save how to make both ends meet. She mused on her future, and hovered in her choice, she feared that sooner or later she must make her election, to take a man or to do without one. The eagle can gaze on the sun without blinking, but Mrs. De Witt could not fix her eye on matrimony without the

water coming into it. That was a step she would not take till driven to it by desperation. The *Pandora's* bottom was not all that could be wished, it was rotten. Mrs. De Witt saw that the repair of the *Pandora* was a matter she could not compass. When she let in water, Mrs. De Witt would admit a husband. Whilst a plank remained impervious to the tide, so would her breast to matrimonial dreams.

The spring tides came, and with them seawater oozing in at the rotted joints of the vessel. Mrs. De Witt was well aware of the presence of bilgewater in the bottom. Bilgewater has the faculty of insisting on cognisance being taken of its presence. Whenever she returned to the *Pandora*, the odour affected her with horror, for it assured her that her days of independence were numbered. But all at once a new light sprang up in the old lady's mind, she saw a middle course open to her; a way of maintaining a partial independence, on a certainty of subsistence.

She had not returned the call made her by her nephew Elijah Rebow. Half a year had elapsed, but that was no matter. Etiquette of high life does not rule the grades to which the Rebows and De Witts belonged. Why should not she keep

house for her nephew? He was well off, and he was little at home ; his house was large, she would have free scope in it for carrying on her own independent mode of life, and her keep would cost her nothing. That house had been her home. In it she had been born and nurtured. She had only left it to be incumbered with a husband and a son. Now she was free from these burdens, what more reasonable than that she should return? It was the natural asylum to which she must flee in her necessity.

It was true indeed that Rebow had taken in Mrs. Sharland and Glory, but what ties attached them to him equal to hers of flesh and blood. Was she not his aunt?

Now that Mrs. De Witt saw that it was clearly in her interest to disestablish the Sharlands and install herself in their place, she saw also, with equal clearness, that morality and religion impelled her to take this course. What was Elijah's connexion with Glory? Was it not a public scandal, the talk of the neighbourhood? As aunt of Rebow was she not in duty bound to interfere, to act a John the Baptist in that Herod's court, and condemn the intimacy as improper?

Mrs. De Witt pulled herself up, morally as well

as physically, and in habit also. That is, she was sitting on her military coat tails, and with a gathering sense of her apostleship of purity she shook them out, she drew in at the same time the strings of her apron and of her cap, tightened and lifted her bustle, so that the red military tails cocked in an audacious and defiant—if not in an apostolic and missionary manner. She ran her fingers through the flutings of her frills, to make them stand out and form a halo round her face, like the corolla of white round the golden centre of the daisy. Then she drank off a noggin of gin to give herself courage, and away she started, up the companion, over the deck, and down the ladder, to row to Red Hall with her purpose hot in her heart.

After the disappearance of the madman, Mehalah had returned to the house and to her room. She said nothing next day of what she had seen. Elijah and his men had searched the marshes and found no trace of the man save the broken chain. That Rebow took back, and hung over his chimney-piece. He enquired in Salcott and Virley but no one there had seen anything of the unfortunate creature. It was obvious that he had not gone inland. He had run outward, and

when it was found that the punt was gone, the conclusion arrived at was that the madman had left the marshes in it.

Elijah rowed to Mersea, and made enquiries without eliciting any information. He went next to Bradwell on the south coast of the great Black-water estuary, there his punt had been found, washed ashore ; but no traces of the man were to be discovered. That he was drowned admitted of no doubt. Rebow satisfied himself that this was the case, and was content to be thus rid of an encumbrance. Mehalah's knowledge of the matter was unsuspected, and she was therefore not questioned. She did not feel any necessity for her to mention what she had seen. It could be of no possible advantage to anybody.

Her life became monotonous, but the monotone was one of gloom. She had lost every interest ; she attended to her mother without heart ; and omitted those little acts of tenderness which had been customary with her, or performed them, when her mother fretted at the omission, in a cold, perfunctory manner. Mrs. Sharland had been accustomed to be overruled by her daughter, but now Mehalah neither listened to nor combated her recommendations. She rarely

spoke, but went through the routine of her work in a mechanical manner. Sometimes she spoke to her mother in a hard, sharp tone the old woman was unused to, and resented; but Mehalah ignored her resentment. She cared neither for her mother's love nor for her displeasure.

When she met the men about the farm, if they addressed her, she repelled them with rudeness, and if obliged to be present with them for some time, did not speak.

Neither had she a word for Rebow. She answered his questions with monosyllables, or not at all, and he had often to repeat them before she condescended to answer. He spoke at meal times, and attempted to draw her into conversation, but she either did not listen to him, was occupied with her own thoughts, or she would not appear to hear and be interested in what he said.

A morose expression clouded and disfigured her countenance, once so frank and genial. Joe remarked to Jim that she was growing like the master. Jim replied that folks who lived together mostly did resemble one another. He knew a collier who had a favourite bull-dog, and they were as alike in face as if they were twins.

Mehalah avoided Abraham, she rarely spoke to him, and when he attempted to open a conversation with her she withdrew abruptly. When all her work was done, she walked along the sea wall to the spit of land, and, seating herself there, remained silent, brooding, with dull, heavy eyes looking out to sea at the passing sails, or the foaming waves.

She did not think, she sat sunk in a dull torpor. She neither hoped anything nor recalled anything. As she had said to Elijah, she neither loved nor hated; she did not fear him or desire him. She disliked to be in his presence, but she would not fix her mind on him, and concern herself about him. Her self-respect was sick, and till that was recovered nothing could interest and revive her.

Mehalah was seated under the windmill when Mrs. De Witt drew to land. That lady was on her war-path, and on seeing the person whom she designed to attack and rout out of her shelter, she turned the beak of her boat directly upon her, and thrust ashore at Mehalah's feet.

The sight of Mrs. De Witt in her red coat roused the girl from her dream, and she rose wearily to her feet and turned to walk away.

‘Glory!’ shouted the fishwife after her. ‘Sackalive! I want to speak to you. Stop at once.’

Mehalah paid no attention to the call, but walked on. Mrs. De Witt was incensed, and, after anchoring her boat, rushed after and overtook her.

‘By Cock!’ exclaimed the lady, ‘Here’s manners! Didn’t you hear me hollering to you to hold hard and heave to?’ She laid her hand on Mehalah’s shoulder. The girl shook it off.

‘Sackalive!’ cried Mrs. De Witt. ‘We are out of temper to-day. We have the meagrim. What is all this about? But I suppose you can’t fare to look an honest woman in the face. The wicious eye will drop before the stare of wirtue!’

‘What have you to say to me?’ asked Mehalah moodily.

‘Why I want to speak along of you about what concerns you most of all. Now his father and his mother are dead, who’s to look after Elijah’s morals but me, his aunt? Now I can’t stand these goings on, Glory! Here are you living in this out-of-the-way house with my nephew, who is not a married man, and folks talk. My family was always respectable, we kept

ourselves up in the world. My husband's family I know nothing about. He was a low chap, and rose out of the mud, like the winkles. I took him up, and then I dropped him again; I was large and generous of heart when I was young— younger than I am now. I wouldn't do it again, it don't pay. The man will raise the woman, but the woman can't lift the man. He grovels in the mud he came out of. She may pick him out and wipe him clean a score of times, but when she ain't looking, in he flops again. I have had my experience. Moses was a good-looking man, but he looked better raw than cooked, he ate tougher than he cut. He wasn't the husband that he seemed to promise as a bachelor. George was another; but he was an advance on Moses, he had a little of me in him. There was Rebow mixed with De Witt; he was a glass of half and half, rum and water. But this is neither here nor there. We are not talking of my family, but of you. I'm here for my nephew's welfare and for yours. Glory! you ain't in Red Hall for any good. Do you think my nephew can take in an old woman that is not worth sixpence to bate lines with, and feed her and find her in liquor for nothing! Everybody knows he's after you.

He's been after you ever so long. Everybody knows that. He had a hankering after you when George was a galliwanting on the Ray. That's known to all the world. Well, you can't live in the house with him and folks not talk.'

'Do you dare to believe——'

'Glory! I always make a point to believe the worst. I'm a religious person, and them as sets up to be religious always does that. It is part of their profession. When I buy fish of the men, I say at once, it stinks, I know it ain't fresh! when I take shrimps I say, they're a week out of the water, and they won't peel nicely. So I look upon you and everyone else, and then it's a wery pleasing surprise when I find that the stale fish turns out fresh. But it ain't often that happens. It may happen now and then, just as now and then a whale is washed up on Mersea Island. Now look you here, Glory! don't you believe that Elijah will marry you and make an honest woman of you. He won't do it. He don't think to do it. He never did intend it. He belongs to a better family than yours. You have gipsy blood in your veins, and he knows it; that's as bad as having king's evil or cancer. I made a mistake and looked below me. He won't do it.

He knows that I made a mistake, he won't do the same. There's as much difference in human flesh as there is in that of flat-fish, some is that of soles, other is that of dabs; some is fresh and firm as that of small eels, other is coarse and greasy as that of conger. The Rebows belong to another lot from you altogether. Elijah knows it. He never thought to marry you. He couldn't do it.'

Mehalah, stung even through the hard panoply of callousness in which she had encased herself, turned surlily on the woman.

'You lie! It is I who will not marry him.'

'There's an Adam and Eve in every brown shrimp,'¹ said Mrs. De Witt sententiously; and there's wigour and weakness in every human creature. It is possible that at a time when Eve is up in Elijah he may have proposed such a foolish thing as to marry you, and it is possible that, at a time when Adam was the master in you, you may have refused him. I don't deny it. But I do say that Elijah will never marry you in cold blood. And I'll tell you what--you won't stand out against him for

¹ Children find in the front paddles of the brown shrimp, when pulled out, two quaint little figures which they call Adam and Eve.

long. He has too much of the Adam, and you too little for that. You may set up your pride and self-will against him, but you will give way in the end—your weakness will yield to his strongheadedness. What he purposes he will carry out ; you cannot oppose Elijah ; the Adam in his heart is too old and vigorous and heady.’

Mehalah made no answer. Sunk in her dark thoughts she strode on, her arms folded over her heart, to still and crush it ; her head bowed.

‘Now Glory !’ pursued Mrs. De Witt ; ‘I’ve a bit of a liking for you, after all, and I’m sorry for what I was forced to do about that five and twenty pounds. I tell you, I am sorry, but I couldn’t help it. I couldn’t starve, you know—I was a lone widow without a son to help me. As I said, I’ve a sort of a liking for you, for you was the girl my George——’ Mehalah’s breast heaved, she uttered an ill-suppressed cry, and then covered her face.

‘My poor George,’ went on the old woman, aware that she had gained an advantage. ‘He was wery fond of you. Sackalive ! how he would love to talk of you to me his doting old mother, and scheme how you was to live in love together ! That boy’s heart was full of you, full

as——' she cast about for a simile, 'as a March sprat is full of oil.' Now I know, my George—he was a good lad! and more like me in features than his father, but he hadn't the soul of a Rebow!—My George, I feel sure, couldn't rest in his grave, if he'd got one, knowing as how tongues were going about you, and hearing what wicked things was said of your character. A woman's good name is like new milk. If it once gets turned there's no sweetening it after, and I can tell you what, Glory! your name is not as fresh as it was; look to it before it is quite curdled and sour.'

'I can do nothing! I can do nothing!' moaned the despairing girl.

'Look you here, Glory!' said Mrs. De Witt. 'I'm the aunt of the party, and I must attend to his morals. I'll go in and see him and I'll manage matters. He's my nephew. I can do anything with him. Trust me with men, girl. I know 'em. They are like nettles. Grasp 'em and they are harmless; touch 'em trembling, and they sting you. They are like eels, try to hold them where you will and they wriggle away, but run a skewer through their gills and you have them.'

'What are you here for, talking to my girl?'

asked Rebow, suddenly coming from behind the house, which Mrs. De Witt had now reached.

‘Sackalive!’ exclaimed his aunt, ‘How you flustered me. We was just talking of you when you appeared. It is wonderful how true proverbs are; they are the Bible of those that don’t read, a sort of scripture written in the air. But I want a talk along of you, Elijah, that is what I’m come after, I your precious aunt, who loves you as the oyster loves his shell, and the crab its young that it cuddles.’

‘What do you want with me?’

‘Come, Elijah, let us go indoors. To tell you Gospel truth, I’m dry after my row and want a wet. As I wet I will talk. I’ve that to say to you that concerns you greatly.’

‘Follow me,’ he said surlily, and led the way up the steps. Mehalah turned back, but walked not to the point where she had been sitting before, lest she should be again disturbed on the return of Mrs. De Witt to her boat. She went instead to the gate at the bridge over the dyke, that led towards Salcott. There was no real road, only a track through the pasture land. She leaned her hands on the bar of the gate and laid her weary head on her hands. Outside the gate was a tillage

field with green wheat in it glancing in the early summer air. Aloft the larks were spiring and caroling. In the ploughed soil of Mehalah's heart nothing had sprung up,—above it no glad thought soared and sang. Her head was paralysed and her heart was numb. The frost lay there, and the clods were as iron.

In the meantime Mrs. De Witt was in the hall with her nephew, endeavouring to melt him into geniality, but he remained morose and unimpressionable.

By slow approaches she drew towards the object of her visit.

‘I have been very troubled, nephew, by the gossip that goes about.’

‘Have you?’ asked he, ‘I thought you were impervious to trouble short of loss of grog.’

‘You know, Elijah, that your character is precious to me. I wally it, for the honour of the family.’

‘What are you driving at?’ he asked with an oath. ‘Speak out, and then take your slimy tongue off my premises.’

‘This is my old home, Elijah, the dear old place where I spent so many happy and innocent days.’

‘Well, you are not likely to spend any more of either sort here now. Say what you have to say, and begone.’

‘You fluster me, Elijah. When I have a glass of rare good stuff such as this, I like to sit over it, and talk, and sip, and relax.’

‘I don’t,’ he said; ‘I gulp it down and am off. Come, say your say, and be quick about it. I have my affairs to attend to and can’t sit here palavering with an old woman.’

‘Oh!’ exclaimed Mrs. De Witt, in rising wrath, ‘If I were young it would be different, if I were not a moral and religious character it would be different, if I were not a Rebow, but half gipsy, half boor, it would be different!’

‘If you allude to Glory, with that sneer,’ said he, ‘I tell you, it would be different.’

‘I dare say!’ exclaimed Mrs. De Witt tossing her head. ‘Blood and kinship are all forgot.’

‘You forgot them fast enough when you ran after Moses De Witt.’

‘I did demean myself, I admit,’ said she; ‘but I have repented it since in dabs and sprats, and I don’t intend to do it again. Listen to me, Elijah. Once for all, I want to know what you mean by keeping this girl Glory here?’

‘You do, do you?—So do I. I wonder; she defies and hates me, yet I keep her. I keep her here, I can do no other. I would to God I could shake free of her and forget her, forget that I had ever seen her, but I can’t do it. She and I are ordained for one another.’

‘Parcel of stuff!’ exclaimed his aunt. ‘You send her packing, her and her old fool of a mother, and I will come and keep house for you.’

‘Pack Glory off!’ echoed Elijah.

‘Yes, break this wretched, degrading tie.’

‘I couldn’t do it!’ he said. ‘I tell you again, I would if I could. I know as well as if it were written in flames on the sky that no good can come of her being here, but for better for worse, for well or for woe, here we two are, and here we remain.’

‘You love her.’

‘I love her and I hate her. I love her with every fibre and vein, and bone and nerve, but I hate her too, with my soul, because she does not love me, but hates me. I could take her to my heart and keep her there,’ his breast heaved and his dark eyes flared, ‘and kiss her on her mouth and squeeze the breath out of her, and cast her dead at my feet. Then perhaps I might be

happy. I am now in hell; but were she not here, were I alone, and she elsewhere, it would be hell unendurable in its agonies, I should go mad like my brother. She must be mine, or my fate is the same as his.'

'Are you going to marry her?'

'She will not marry me. Believe what I say. That girl, Glory, is the curse and ruin of me and of this house. I know it, and yet I cannot help it. She might have made me happy and built up my prosperity and family. Then I should have been a good and a glad man, a man altogether other from what I am now. But your son came in the way. He marred everything. Glory still thinks of him, it does not matter that he be gone. She will cling to him and keep from me. Yet she is destined for me. She never was for George. If he were to turn up—I don't say that it is possible or even probable, but suppose he were—she would fly to him. I might chain her up, but she'd break away. There is nothing for it,' he pursued, drooping into a sullen mood. 'We must battle it out between us. None can or must inter-vene; whoever attempts it shall be trampled under our feet. We must work out our own fate together; there is no help for it. I tell you, if I were born

again, and I knew that this were before me, I'd fly to the Indies, to Africa, anywhere to be from her, so as never to see her, never to know of her, and then I might jog on through life in quiet, and some sort of happiness. But that is not possible. I have seen her. I have her here under my roof, but we are still apart as the poles. Go away, aunt, it is of no good your interfering. No one comes here, she and I must work the sum out between us. There's a fate over all and we cannot fight against it, but it falls on us and crushes us.'

Mrs. De Witt was awed. She rose. She knew that her mission was fruitless, that there was no possibility of her gaining her point.

She opened the door, and started back before an apparition in carnation and white.

'Whom have we here?'

'Mrs. Charles Pettican, madam,' said the apparition with a stately curtsy.

CHAPTER VII.

THE LAST STRAW.

MEHALAH was lost to consciousness, leaning on the gate, her aching brow and leaden eyes in her hand. She did not hear the larks that sang above her, nor saw the buttercups and daisies that smiled to her from below. By the gate was a willow covered with furry flower now ripe and shedding its golden pollen. The soft air scattered the delicate yellow dust over the girl's hair and neck and shoulders, a minute golden powder, but she noticed it not. The warm air played caressingly with some of her dark hair, and the sun brought out its copper glow—she was unaware of all.

A little blue butterfly flickered above her and lighted on her head, it lay so still that the insect had no fear.

Then a hand shook the gate.

‘Gone to sleep, girl?’ asked a female voice.

Mehalah looked up dreamily.

A young, handsome, and dashing lady before her, in white and carnation, a crimson feather in her hat, and carmine in her cheeks. Mehalah slowly recognised Admonition.

Mrs. Pettican looked curiously at her.

‘Who are you? — Oh! I know, the girl Sharland!’ and she laughed.

Mehalah put her hand to the latch to open the gate.

‘You need not trouble,’ said Admonition; ‘I want nothing from you. I have heard of you. You are the young person,’ with an affected cough, ‘whom Master Rebow has taken to live with him I think. You had the assurance once to come to my dear husband, and to pester him.’

‘He was kind to me,’ said Mehalah to herself.

‘Oh yes, he was very kind indeed. He did not know much of you then. Report had not made him familiar with your name.’

Mehalah looked moodily at her. It was of no use pretending to misunderstand her. It was of no use resenting the insinuation. She sullenly bore the blow and suffered.

‘I have come here on your behalf,’ said Admonition, speaking to her across the gate.

She had the gate half open, and kept it between them.

‘You have nothing to do with me, or I with you,’ said Mehalah.

‘Oh! nothing, I am respectable. I keep myself up, I look after my character!’ sneered Mrs. Pettican. ‘Nevertheless I am here with an offer from my husband. He is ready to receive your mother into his house; I do not approve of this, but he is perverse and will have his way. He will take her in and provide for her.’

Mehalah looked up. A load was being lifted from her heart. Were her mother taken in by Mr. Pettican, then she could leave, and leave for ever, Red Hall.

‘Yes. He admits his relationship,’ said Admonition. ‘I would not, were I he, now that the name is—well—not so savoury as it was. But he is not particular. Men are not. I have been brought up, I am thankful to say, with very strict ideas, and have been formed in a school quite other from that of Mr. Pettican. However, as I was observing—you need not come near me—keep the gate between us, please.’

‘You were saying,’ anxiously repeated Mehalah, who had stepped forward in her eagerness.

‘I was saying that Mr. Pettican will overlook a great deal, and will receive your mother into his house, and provide her with all that is necessary. But you——’

‘I,’ repeated Mehalah, breathlessly.

‘You must never, never set foot within my doors. I could not allow it. I am a person of respectability, I value proprieties. I could not allow my house to be spoken of as one which admitted——’ with a contemptuous shrug.

Mehalah took no notice of the insult. She looked hard at Admonition, and said gravely, ‘You will shelter and care for my mother, on condition that I never go near her.’

‘Yes.’

‘I may never see her, never speak to her, never kiss her again.’

‘No, I could not suffer you to enter my respectable house.’

‘Not even if she were dying?’

‘My character would not allow of it. The respectability of my house must be maintained.’

Mehalah thought for a while.

‘I cannot make up my mind at once,’ she said.

‘It will be a great relief to you to get rid of your mother.’

‘Yes, immeasurable.’

‘I thought as much!’ with a toss of the head, and curl of the lip.

Mehalah did not give attention to these marks of contempt. Presently she asked, ‘And who will attend to my mother?’

‘I will.’

‘*You!*’ exclaimed Glory, with a flash of her old indignation, ‘*You*, who neglect and illtreat the husband who lifted you out of the gutter. You who have not gratitude and generosity to the man to whom you owe your position and comforts! How would you treat a poor, helpless, aged woman trusting to your mercy unconditioned, when the man who bound you to him by most solemn and sacred promises is insulted, and neglected, and degraded by you? No, never. My mother shall never, never be left to you of all women in the world. Never, never, never!’ she beat her hand on the gate. ‘Let me bear my burden, let it crush me, but she shall not be taken from me and die of neglect and cruel treatment. I can bear!’ she raised herself with a poor effort of her old energy, ‘I will bear all for her. She once bore with me.’

‘Drab!’ hissed Admonition, and she flung past her, shaking the gate furiously as she went by.

It was with carnation in her cheek as well as in her dress and hat that she appeared before Mrs. De Witt and Elijah Rebow.

Mrs. De Witt drew back to let Mrs. Pettican in.

‘I think you was passing out,’ said the latter, ‘Madam, your servant.’

‘Your servant, madam,’ from Mrs. De Witt, still lingering.

‘Now then, one at a time. Aunt, go out and shut the door,’ said Rebow peremptorily, and the old woman was obliged to obey.

‘What has brought you here?’ asked Elijah surly.

Mrs. Pettican looked round, then drew nearer. ‘I think,’ she said, ‘you once advised me something, but—I don’t know how far your interest is the same as it was.’

‘What do you mean?’

‘I don’t know whether you would be satisfied to get Mehalah Sharland off your hands now, or keep her here.’

‘She remains here, she never shall leave it.’

‘It is just this,’ said Admonition. ‘My husband has of late been plucking up a little courage, or showing obstinacy. My cousin Timothy

—I don't know what to make of him—he is not what he was. He is always making some excuse or other to get away, and I find he goes to Mersea. He hasn't been as dutiful and amiable to me of late, as I have a right to expect, considering how I have found him in food and drink and tobacco, the best of all, and no stint. There's some game up between him and my husband, and I believe it is this, I know it is this. Charles is bent on getting Mrs. Sharland and her daughter, the latter especially, to come and live with him and take care of him. He dares to say I neglect him. He reckons on pitting that girl against me, he thinks that she would be more than a match for me.'

'He thinks right,' burst in Rebow with a laugh.

'I won't have her in the house. I don't mind taking in the old woman, but the daughter I will not admit.'

'You are right. She'd master you and make you docile or drive you out,' jeered Rebow.

'She shall not come. I have told her so. I will not be opposed and brow-beaten in my own house. I will not have the care of my husband wrested from me.'

'Have you come here to tell me this?'

'I know that Charles and Timothy have put

their heads together. They are both up in rebellion against me, and Timothy has walked over to Mersea to get a boat and row here to invite that girl to come with her mother to Wyvenhoe, and take up their abode with my husband. Charles promises if they will do so to provide for them and leave them everything in his will, so as to make them independent at my cost. When I got wind of this—I overheard the scheme by the merest accident—I got a gig and was driven over to Salcott, and the boy has put up the horse at the inn, and I walked on. I will stop this little game. The girl shall not come inside the house. If she puts in her little finger, her fist will follow, and I will be driven out, though I am the lawful wife of Charles Pettican. I don't know what Timothy means by aiding and abetting him in this. I will have it out with him, and that very soon. I want to know what are your views. I have been pretty plain with mine. You may help me or hinder me, but I hope I shall be able to keep my door locked against such as that girl, and if Timothy thinks to flirt along with her under my roof, and before my face, he is vastly mistaken. That husband of mine is deeper than I suspected, or he would not have come over Timothy and got him

to aid him in this. But I see it all. Timothy thinks if the girl gets there, and is to have Charles' money, he will make up to her, marry her, and share the plunder. If that be his game he has left me out of his calculations. Timothy is a fool, or he would not have gone over from me to Charles. I'll have the matter out here——'

'Not in this room,' said Elijah. 'There's rows enough go on in here without your making another. Set your mind at rest: Glory does not leave this house. But I advise you to see your cousin, and, if possible, prevent him from making the proposal. If she hears it, she will be off to-morrow, and carry her mother with her; and then there may be trouble to you and me to get her back.'

'She shall not come across my doorstep.'

'I tell you if once she hears that the chance is given her, she will go, and not you nor a legion of such as you could keep her out. Go up stairs and straight on till you come to a door. Go in there; it is the bedroom of Glory and her mother. Never mind the old fool—she is sick and in bed. You will find a small room or closet beyond, with a three-cornered window in it. Look out of that. It commands the whole bay, and you will see a

boat, if it approaches the Hall. There's Sunken island and Cobb marsh between you and Mersea City. You will see a boat creep through one of the creeks of Cobb marsh into Virley flat, and that will be the boat with your cousin in it. If you come down then you will meet him as he lands.'

As soon as Admonition had rushed past Mehalah the girl walked away from the gate and ascended the sea-wall. She could obtain peace nowhere. She could hide nowhere, be nowhere without interruption. She saw Mrs. De Witt depart, and thought that now she could sit on the wall and remain unmolested. But again was she disturbed, this time by old Abraham. He was at the near landing-stage, just come from the Ray—the landing-place employed when tides were full.

'Hark ye, mistress,' said the shepherd. 'I've had much on my tongue this many a day, but you haven't given me the chance to spit it out. I won't be put off any longer.'

She did not answer or move away. The reaction after the momentary kindling of hope and burst of passion had set in, and she had relapsed into her now wonted mood.

'It is of no use, mistress, your going on as

you are,' continued the old man. 'Wherever he is, the master speaks of you as no man ought to speak save of his wife; and all the world knows you are not that. What are you, then? You are in a false position, and that is one of your own making.'

'You know it is not, Abraham.'

'I know it is one you could step out of to-morrow if you chose,' he said. 'The master has offered you your right place. As long as you refuse to take it so long everybody will be turned against you, and you against everybody. You keep away from everybody because you shame to see them and be seen by them. I know you don't like the master, but that's no reason why you shouldn't take him. Beggars mustn't be choosers. He is not as young and handsome as George De Witt, but he is not such a fool, and he has his pockets well lined, which the other had not.'

'It is of no use your saying this to me, Abraham,' said Mehalah sadly.

'No, it is not,' pursued the dogged old man. 'Here you must stick as long as your mother lives, and she may live yet a score of years. Creaky gates last longest. Why, she ain't as old as I, and there's a score of years' work in me yet.'

How can you spend twenty years here along of the master, with all the world talking? It will shame you to your grave, or brazen you past respect. This state of things can't do good to anybody. You must take him, and set yourself right with the world, or go from here.'

'I cannot get away. Would to heaven I could!'

'Then you must marry him. There is no escape from it, for your own sake. Why, girl,' the shepherd went on, 'if you was his wife you would have a lawful right and place here—this house, these marshes, these cattle would be yours. You would not be dependent on him for anything; you would hold them as a right. Now he can have you and your mother in prison at any time, for you are still his tenants and owe him rent for the Ray. But if you marry him, you cut away his power: he can't proceed against you and your mother for one penny. You would cancel the debt, do away with the obligation. If you was to marry him, and saw your way clear, I fancy you might go away at any time, and he would have no hold on you. Now he has you fast by this claim. And now your character is being ruined by association with him. There,' continued

the old man, 'I doubt I never said so much afore ; but I have known you since you was a girl, and I no more like to see you going to the bad than I like to see a field that has been well tilled allowed to be overrun with thistles, or a sheep lie down in the fen and die of rot that might have been saved with a little ointment stuck on in proper time.'

Mehalah made no response.

'I dare say it stings,' said Dowsing. 'I've seen sheep jump with pain when the copperas comes against a raw ; but that's better than to lie down and rot away without an effort, and without a word, as you are doing now.' He gave her a nod, and went on his way.

Mehalah stepped into his boat and seated herself in her usual manner, with her head in her arms, and sank into her wonted torpor.

'Now, then, young woman !'

Again interrupted, again aroused. There was no rest for her that day.

'Jump on land, will you, young woman, and let this lass step into your boat and get ashore without having to go into the mud.'

'Timothy ! that is Mehalah !' exclaimed Phoebe Musset. She was in the boat with Admonition's cousin. 'I'd rather you carried

me. I do not want to be obliged to her for anything.'

Mehalah stepped from her boat upon the turf, and held out her hand mechanically to assist the girl.

'Don't hold out your hand to me!' screamed Phœbe. 'I wouldn't touch it. Keep to yourself, if you please, and let me pass.'

'Why, Phœbe!' exclaimed Timothy, 'what is the matter? I have come here to see this girl.'

'What!—to see Mehalah—or Glory, as you sailor and fisher fellows like to call her?'

'Yes.'

'Then I'm ashamed to have come with you,' said Phœbe, pouting. 'You offered me a nice little row on the water, and the sun was so bright, and the air so warm, and you were so agreeable, that I ventured; but I would not have stepped into the boat had I known you were coming to visit another young woman, and she one of so smirched a character.'

'Phœbe! For shame!'

'For shame!' repeated the girl turning on Timothy. 'For shame to you, to bring me here with you when you are visiting this——' She eyed Mehalah from head to foot with studied insolence,

and sniffed. 'I know her. A bad, spiteful cat! always running after fellows. She tried to wheedle poor George De Witt into marrying her. When he was lost, she burnt her house and flung herself on the mercy, into the arms, of Rebow. Now, I suppose, she is setting her red cap at you. Oh! where is the cap gone, eh?' turning to Mehalah as she skipped ashore.

Timothy was fastening the boat to that of Dowsing.

Mehalah's wrath was rising. She had endured much that day—more than she could well bear. The impertinence of this malicious girl was intolerable altogether. She turned away to leave her.

'Stop! stop!' shouted Timothy. 'I have come here with a message to you. I have come here expressly to see you. I picked up Miss Musset on the way——'

'You picked me up just to amuse me till you found Glory!' screamed Phoebe. 'Now you pitch me overboard, as that savage treated me once. I will not stand this. Timothy, come back this instant! Row me back to Mersea. I have not come here to be insulted. I will not speak another word with you unless you——'

'For heaven's sake,' cried Timothy, tearing

down the sea-wall and jumping into the boat, 'come in, Phœbe, at once, or I shall be off and leave you!'

'What is the matter now?'

He had his knife out, and was hacking through the cord that attached his boat to Dowsing's. In another moment he was rowing, as hard as he could, down the creek.

Admonition appeared on the wall. Timothy had detected her crossing the marsh, and fled.

She turned in fury on Phœbe.

Mehalah withdrew to the windmill, away from their angry voices, and remained sitting by the sea till the shadows of evening fell.

Then she returned, a fixed determination in her face, which was harder and more moody than before.

She walked deliberately to the hall, opened the door, and stepped in. Elijah was there, crouched over the empty hearth, as though there was a fire on it. He looked up.

'Well, Glory?'

Her bosom heaved. She could not speak.

'You have something to say,' he proceeded. 'Won't the words come out? Do they stick?' His wild dark eye was on her.

‘Elijah,’ she said, with burning brow and cheek, ‘I give up. I will marry you.’

He gave a great shout and sprang up.

‘Listen patiently to me,’ she said, with difficulty controlling her agitation. ‘I will marry you, and take your name, but only to save mine. That is all. I will neither love you, nor live with you, save as I do now. These are my terms. If you will take them, so be it. If not, we shall go on as before.’

He laughed loudly, savagely.

‘I told you, Glory, my own, own Glory, what must be. You would not come under my roof, but you came. You would not marry me—now you submit. You will not love me—you must and shall. Nothing can keep us apart. The poles are drawing together. Perhaps there may be a heaven for us both here. But I do not know. Anyhow the sum is nearer the end than it was. Glory, this day week you shall be my wife.’

CHAPTER VIII.

BEFORE THE ALTAR.

VIRLEY CHURCH has been already described, as far as its external appearance goes. The interior was even less decent.

It possessed but one bell, which was tolled alike for weddings and for funerals ; there was a difference in the pace at which it went for these distinct solemnities, but that was all. The bell produced neither a cheerful nor a lugubrious effect on either occasion, as it was cracked. The dedication of Virley Church is unknown—no doubt because it never had a patron ; or if it had, the patron disowned it. No saint in the calendar could be associated with such a church and keep his character. St. Nicholas is the patron of fishers, St. Giles of beggars, but who among the holy ones would spread his mantle over worshippers who were smugglers or wreckers ? When we speak of worshippers we use an euphemism ; for though

the church sometimes contained a congregation, it never held one of worshippers. Salcott and Virley, the Siamese-twin parishes, connected by a wooden bridge, embraced together five hundred souls. There were two churches, but few churchgoers.

On the day of which we write, however, Virley Church was full to overflowing. This is not saying much, for Virley Church is not bigger than a stable that consists of two stalls and a loose box, whereof the loose box represents the chancel. When the curate in charge preached from the pulpit—the rectors of the two parishes were always non-resident—they kept a curate between them—he was able to cuff the boys in the west gallery who whispered, cracked nuts, or snored.

The bellringer stood in the gallery, and had much ado to guard his knuckles from abrasion against the ceiling at each upcast of the rope. He managed to save them when tolling for a burial, but when the movement was double-quick for a wedding his knuckles came continually in contact with the plaster; and when they did an oath, audible throughout the sacred building, boomed between the clangours of the bell.

Virley Church possessed one respectable feature, a massive chancel-arch, but that gaped; and

the pillars slouched back against the wall in the attitude of the Virley men in the village street waiting to insult the women as they went by.

On either side of the east window hung one table of the Commandments, but a village humourist had erased all the 'nots' in the Decalogue; and it cannot be denied that the parishioners conscientiously did their utmost to fulfil the letter of the law thus altered.

The congregation on Sundays consisted chiefly of young people. The youths who attended divine worship occupied the hour of devotion by wafting kisses to the girls, making faces at the children, and scratching ships on the paint of the pews. Indeed, the religious services performed alternately at the two churches might have been discontinued, without discomposure to any, had not traditional usage consecrated them to the meeting of young couples. The 'dearly beloveds' met in the Lord's house every Lord's day to acknowledge their 'erring and straying like lost sheep' and make appointments for erring and straying again.

The altar was a deal table, much wormeaten, with a box beneath it. The altar possessed no cover save the red cotton pocket-handkerchief of the curate cast occasionally across it. The box

contained the battered Communion plate, an iron-moulded surplice with high collar, a register-book, the pages glued together with damp, and a brush and pan.

The Communion rails had rotted at the bottom ; and when there was a Communion the clerk had to caution the kneelers not to lean against the balustrade, lest they should be precipitated upon the sanctuary floor.

No such controversy as that which has of late years agitated the Church of England, relative to the position of the celebrant, could have affected Virley, for the floor in the midst, before the altar, had been eaten through by rats, emerging from an old grave, and exposed below gnawed and mouldy bones a foot beneath the boards.

A marriage without three ‘askings’ was a novelty in Salcott and Virley sufficient to excite interest in the place ; and when that marriage was to take place between one so well known and dreaded as Elijah Rebow and a girl hardly ever seen, but of whom much was spoken, it may well be supposed that Virley Church was crowded with sightseers. The gallery was full to bursting. Sailor-boys in the front amused themselves with dropping broken bits of tobacco-pipe on the heads

below, and giggling at the impotent rage of those they hit.

There was a sweep in Salcott, who tenanted a tottering cottage, devoid of furniture. The one room was heaped with straw, and into this the sweep crept at night for his slumbers. This man now appeared at the sacred door.

‘Look out, blackie!’ shouted those near; ‘we are not going to be smutted by you.’

‘Then make way for your superiors.’

‘Superiors!’ sneered a matron near.

‘Well, I am your superior,’ said the sweep, ‘for my proper place is poking out at the top of a chimney, and yours is poking into the fire at the bottom. Make way. I have a right to see as well as the best of you.’

The crowd contracted on either side in anxiety for their clothes, and the sweep worked his way to the fore.

‘I’ll have the best place of you all,’ he said as the gods in the gallery received him with ironical cries of ‘Sweep! sweep!’

He charged into the chancel, and sent his black legs over the Communion rails.

At some remote period the chancel of Virley had fallen, and had been rebuilt with timber and

bricks on the old walls left to the height of two feet above the floor. As the old walls were four feet thick, and the new walls only the thickness of one brick, the chancel was provided with a low seat all round it, like the *cancellæ* of an ancient basilica. The sweep, with a keen eye peering through his soot, had detected this seat and seen that it was unappropriated. He was over the altar with a second jump, and had seated himself behind it, facing west, in the post of dignity occupied in the Primitive Church by the bishop, with his legs under the table, and his elbows on it, commanding the best view attainable of everything that went on, or that would go on, in the church.

His example was followed at once. A rush of boys and men was made for the chancel; the railings fell before them, and they seized and appropriated the whole of the low seat that surrounded the sanctuary.

‘I’ve the best place now, you lubbers,’ said the sweep. ‘I shall have them full in face, and see the blushes of the bride.’

‘They are a-coming! they are a-coming!’ was repeated through the church. A boy peering out of the window that lighted the gallery had

seen the approach of the procession from Red Hall over the wooden bridge.

In came the Reverend Mr. Rabbit, very hot and sneezy—he laboured under hay fever all the blooming time of the year. He got to the altar. The clerk dived into the box and rose to the surface with the register-book and the surplice.

‘Where is the ink?’

‘Here is a pen,’ said the clerk, producing one with nibs parted like the legs of the Colossus of Rhodes.

‘But we shall want ink.’

‘There is a bottle somewhere in the box,’ said the clerk.

‘Never mind if there ain’t,’ observed one of the elders seated by the table; ‘there is the sweep here handy, and you have only to mix a bit of his smut with the tears of the bride.’

‘Shut that ugly trap of yours,’ said the chimney-cleaner.

‘It may be ugly,’ retorted the humourist, ‘but it is clean.’

‘Here they are!’ from the gallery.

‘Make way!’ shouted Mrs. De Witt, battering about her with her umbrella. ‘How are people

to get married if you stuff up the door, as though caulking a leak?'

She drove her way in.

'Now, then,' said she, 'come on, Mistress Sharland. Dear soul alive! how unmannerly these Virley people are! They want some of us from Mersea to come and teach them manners. Now, then, young Spat!' she shouted to a great boy in a fishing guernsey, 'do you want your head combing? Do you see what you have done to my best silk gown? What do you mean coming to a house of worship in mud-splashers?'¹ Are you come here after winkles?'

'I ain't got my splashers on,' said the boy.

'Then you have feet as big and as dirty as paddles. You have trodden on my best silk and took it out at the gathers.' Then, turning and looking through the door behind her, she waved her umbrella with a proud flourish. 'Come on, hearties! I've cleared the way.'

She put her shoulder to the crowd and wedged her way further ahead. 'Ah!' she said, 'here are a lot of sniggering girls. If all was known what ought to be known some of you

¹ Wooden paddles, worn by those who go out 'winkling' in the mud, to prevent their sinking.

ought to be getting married to-day. Leave off your laughing up there!’ gesticulating towards the boys in the loft. ‘Don’t you know yet how to behave in a place of worship? I have a great mind to draw my *Pandora* up at Virley hard and settle here and teach you.’

Mehalah came in, pale, with sunken eyes, that burned with feverish brightness. A hectic flush dyed her cheeks. Her lips were set and did not tremble.

After having giving her promise, under conditions, to Rebow she had neither slept nor eaten. She had abandoned her habit of retiring to the shore to sit and brood, and maintained instead incessant activity. When she had done what was necessary for others she made work for herself.

Mrs. Sharland had forgotten her ague and left her bed in the excitement and pleasure of her daughter’s submission. She had attempted several times to speak to Mehalah of her approaching marriage, but had not been able to wring a word out of her. From the moment Glory gave her consent to Rebow she said not another syllable on the subject to him or to anyone. She became more taciturn and retiring, if possible, than before.

Abraham Dowsing had saluted her and attempted a rough congratulation. She had turned her back and walked away.

Elijah's conduct was the reverse of Glory's. His gloom was gone, and had made way for boisterous and demonstrative joy. His pride was roused, and he insisted on the marriage preparations being made on a liberal scale. He threw a purse into Mrs. Sharland's lap, and bade her spend it how she liked on Mehalah's outfit and her own. The old woman had been supremely happy in arranging everything, her happiness only dashed by the unsympathetic conduct of one chief performer in the ceremony, her daughter, whom she could not interest in any point connected with it.

There had been a little struggle that morning. Mehalah had drawn on her blue 'Gloriana' jersey as usual, and Mrs. Sharland had insisted on its coming off. The girl had submitted after a slight resistance, and had allowed herself passively to be arrayed as her mother chose.

Elijah was dressed in a blue coat, with brass buttons, and knee-breeches. No one had seen him so spruce before.

'I say, dame,' whispered Farmer Goppin to

his wife, 'the master of Red Hall is turning over a new leaf to-day.'

'Maybe,' she answered, 'but I doubt it will be a blank one. Look at the girl. It won't be a gay¹ for him.'

'Move on!' said Mrs. De Witt. 'I'll keep the road.'

Mrs. De Witt had come at Rebow's special request. She had put on for the occasion her silk dress, in which she had gone from home and been married. Her figure had altered considerably through age and maternity, and the dress was now not a little too tight for her. Her hooking together had been a labour of difficulty, performed by Mrs. Sharland at Red Hall; it had been beyond her own unassisted powers, in the *Pandora*, when she drew on the ancient dress.

'Dear Sackalive!' exclaimed Mrs. De Witt when she extracted the garment from the lavender in which it had lain, like a corpse in balm, for some five-and-twenty years, 'I was a fool when I last put you on; and I won't fit myself out in you again for the same purpose, unless I am driven to it by desperate circumstances.'

Unable to make the body meet, she had thrown

¹ Essex for 'Picture.'

a smart red coat over it; and having engaged a boy to row her to Red Hall, sat in the stern, with her skirt pinned over her head, as though the upper part of her person were enveloped in a camera lucida, in which she was viewing in miniature the movements of the outer world. On reaching Red Hall she had thrown off the scarlet, and presented her back pleadingly to Mrs. Sharland.

‘I ought not to have done it, but I did,’ said she in a tone of confidence. ‘I mean I oughtn’t to have put this gown on, last time I wore it?’ she explained when Mrs. Sharland inquired her meaning. ‘It was thus it came about: I was intimate with the sister of Moses De Witt, and one Mersea fair I went over to the merrymakings, and she invited me to take a mouthful with her and her brother on board the *Pandora*. I went, and I liked the looks of the vessel, and of Moses, so I said to him, “You seem wery comfortable here, and I think I could make myself comfortable here too. So, if you are noways unobjectionable, I think I will stay.” And I did. I put on my silk gown, and was married to Moses, in spite of all my parents said, and I turned the sister of De Witt out and took her place.’

Mrs. De Witt felt great restraint in the silk

gown. Her arms were like wings growing out of her shoulderblades. She was not altogether satisfied that the hooks would hold, and therefore carried to church with her the military coat, over her arm. She wore her hair elaborately frizzled. She had done it with the stove poker, and had worn it for some days in curlpapers. Over this was a broad white chip hat, tied under her chin with skyblue ribands, and she had inserted a sprig of forget-me-nots inside the frizzle of hair over her forehead. 'Bless my soul,' she said to herself, 'the boys will go stark staring mad of love at the sight of me. I look like a pretty miss of fifteen—I do, by Cock!'

Mrs. De Witt succeeded in bringing her party before the altar, at which still sat the sweep, deaf to the feeble expostulations of the curate, which he had listened to with one eye closed and his red tongue hanging out of the corner of his mouth.

Mr. Rabbit was obliged to content himself with a protest, and vest himself hastily for the function.

'Look here,' said Mrs. De Witt, who took on herself the office of master of the ceremonies: 'I am not going to be trodden on and crumpled.

Stand back, good people ; stand back, you parcel of unmannerly cubs ! Let me get where I can keep the boys in order and see that everything gives satisfaction. I have been married ; I ought to know all the ways and workings of it, and I do.'

She thrust her way to the pulpit, ascended the stair, and installed herself therein.

'Oh, my eye !' whispered the boys in the gallery. 'The old lady is busted all down her back !'

'What is that ?' asked Mrs. De Witt in dismay. She put her hands behind her. The observation of the boys was just. Her efforts to clear a way had been attended with ruin to the fastenings of her dress, and had brought back her arms to their normal position at the expense of hooks-and-eyes.

'It can't be helped,' said Mrs. De Witt, 'so here goes !' And she drew on her military coat to hide the wreck.

'Now, then, parson, cast off ! Elijah, you stand on the right, and Glory on the left.'

The curate sneezed violently and rubbed his nose, and then his inflamed eyes. The dust of the flowering grass got even into that mouldy church,

rank with grave odours and rotting timber. He began with the Exhortation. Mrs. De Witt followed each sentence with attention and appropriate gesture.

“Is not to be enterprised nor taken in hand unadvisedly, lightly, or wantonly,” she repeated, with solemn face and in an awestruck whisper; then, poking the boys in the gallery with her umbrella, ‘Just you listen to that, you cubs!’ Then she nodded and gesticulated at the firstly, secondly and thirdly of the address to those whom she thought needed impressing with the solemn words. Elijah answered loudly to the questions asked him whether he would have the girl at his side to be his wedded wife. Her answer was faint and reluctantly given.

“Who giveth this woman to be married to this man?”

There was a pause.

‘Speak up, Mistress Sharland, speak up!’ said Mrs. De Witt in a tone of authority. ‘Or, if you don’t speak, curtsey.’

The curate was affected with a violent sneezing fit. When he recovered he went on.

Rebow clasped Mehalah’s hand firmly, and firmly repeated the sentences after the priest.

‘“ I, Elijah, take thee——” ’ began the curate ; then asked, in a whisper, ‘ What is the bride’s name ? ’

‘ Mehalah,’ answered the mother.

‘“ I, Elijah, take thee, Mehalah, to my wedded wife,” ’ began the curate.

‘“ I, Elijah, take thee, Glory, to my wedded wife,” ’ repeated Rebow.

‘ That is not the name,’ protested Mr. Rabbit.

‘ I marry Glory, and no one else ; I take her by that name and by none other,’ said Rebow. ‘ Go on.’

‘ Say the words after me,’ the curate whispered to Mehalah, who began to tremble. She obeyed, but stopped at the promise ‘ to love, cherish, and to obey.’ The curate repeated it again.

‘“ To obey,” ’ said Mehalah.

Mr. Rabbit looked uncertain how to act.

‘“ To love, cherish, and obey,” ’ he suggested faintly.

‘ Go on,’ ordered Rebow. ‘ Let her obey now ; the rest will come in due season.’

The priest nervously submitted.

‘ Now for the ring,’ said the clerk. ‘ Put it on the book.’

Rebow was taken by surprise. 'By heaven!' he said, 'I forgot all about that.'

'You must have something to use for the purpose,' said the curate. 'Have you no ring of your own?'

'No. Am I like to have?'

'Then let her mother lend her her own marriage-ring.'

'She shall not,' said Rebow angrily. 'No, no! Glory's marriage with me is not a second-hand affair, and like that of such fools as she,' pointing to Mrs. Sharland. 'No, we shall use a ring such as has never been used before, because our union is unlike all other unions. Will this do?' He drew the link of an iron chain from his pocket.

'This is a link broke off my brother's fetters. I picked it up on the sea-wall this morning. Will it do?'

'It must do for want of a better,' said the curate.

Elijah threw it on the book; then placed it on Mehalah's finger, with a subdued laugh. 'Our bond, Glory,' he said, in a low tone, 'is not of gold, but of iron.'

CHAPTER IX.

THE VIAL OF WRATH.

ELIJAH REBOW in the pride and ostentation of his heart had invited the curate, the clerk, Mrs. De Witt, Farmer Goppin, Reuben Grout, inn-keeper of the 'Rising Sun,' and several others to eat and drink with him and his bride at Red Hall after the ceremony. The marriage had taken place in the afternoon. The law in Marsh-land was flexible as osier—it must bend to man's convenience, not man submit to law.

Mrs. De Witt took the management of everything out of the hands of the feeble Mrs. Sharland. 'You're not up to the job,' she said. 'It wants some one with eyes in her elbows and as many legs as a crab.'

Mrs. De Witt was everywhere in the kitchen, the hall, the oak parlour. She had pinned up her silk dress about her, so that it might take no harm.

‘There,’ said she to the assembled guests as she brought in a pail full of shrimps and set it on the table. ‘Stay your appetites on them, and imitate the manners of high society, which always begins with fish and works up to solids. I brought them myself as my contribution to the feast. Do you, Elijah, hand a wet round : if the others be like me they are dry. Marriage, as I always found it, is a dry job.’

‘Where is Glory?’ asked Elijah.

‘Oh, yes!’ exclaimed Mrs. De Witt. ‘That is like you, Elijah, shouting, “Where is Glory?” Do you think she is to come here toozling about among the wittles in her best gown? She is upstairs getting her dress changed.’

He was pacified.

Mrs. Sharland passed here and there, eager to be supposed useful, actually getting across Mrs. De Witt’s path and interfering with her proceedings.

‘I can’t stand this,’ said the fishwife. ‘You go upstairs and see after Mehalah. I am going to dish up the pudding.’

‘I will take the gravy in the sauceboat,’ said Mrs. Sharland.

‘Don’t get your shivers on at the time, then,

and send the grease over everyone,' advised Mrs. De Witt.

'There now, Elijah!' exclaimed she, full of pride, when the table was spread. 'Do look at them dumplings. They are round, plump, and beautiful as cherubs' heads on monuments.'

'Where is Glory?' asked Rebow.

'Run up,' said Mrs. De Witt to the mother, 'tell the girl we are waiting for her. Bid her come at once before the gravy clots.'

An Essex dinner begins with dumplings soured in gravy. When these have been demolished the flesh follows.

The guests sat, with black-handled knives and forks in hand, mouths and noses projected, and eyes riveted on the steaming puddings, ready to cut into them the moment the signal was given.

Mrs. Sharland was slow of foot. Every step was taken leisurely up the stairs and along the passage.

'I'm afeared,' said Farmer Goppin, 'the outer edge of the pudding, about an inch deep all round, is getting the chill.'

'And there is a scum of fat forming on the gravy,' said Reuben Grout, 'just like cat-ice on

my duck-pond, or like mardlins¹ in spring on a ditch. Had not I better set the gravy against the fire till the good lady comes down?’

‘She is coming,’ said Rebow; and then he drummed on the table with his knife. Mrs. Sharland leisurely returned. She was alone.

‘Well?’ from Rebow.

‘Mehalah is not in her room.’

‘Curse it!’ said Elijah. ‘Where is she, then? Go and fetch her.’

‘I do not know where she is.’

‘She will be here directly,’ said Rebow, controlling himself. ‘You may fall to, neighbours.’

At the word every fork was plunged into the puddings, and every knife driven into their hearts. Each sought who could appropriate to himself the largest block of pudding. Then there ensued a struggle for the gravy, and great impatience was manifested by those who had to wait till others had well drenched their hunches of dough in the greasy liquor.

Rebow leaned back in his chair, holding knife and fork erect on the table. ‘Why is she not here? She ought to be here.’

¹ ‘Mardlins’ are duckweed.

‘Take some dumpling, Elijah?’

‘I won’t eat till my Glory comes.’

‘Lord preserve you!’ exclaimed Mrs. De Witt, slapping his back. ‘Go on and eat. You don’t understand girls, as you do calves, that is a fact. Why, a girl on her marriage-day is shame-faced, and does not like to be seen. In high society they hide their heads in their wails all day. That is what the wails are for. I was like that. You may look at me, but it is true as that every oyster wears a beard. When I was married to Moses I was that kittle, coy young bird I would have dived and hid among the barnacles on the keel of the wessel, had I been able to keep under water like a duck.’

‘Where is she?’

‘How do I know? Never fear; she is somewhere—gone out to get a little fresh air. It was hot and stank in that hold of an old church. What with the live corpses above in the pews and the dead ones below deck, it gave me a headache, and you may be sure Mehalah was overcome. I saw she did not look well. The pleasure, I suppose, has been too much for her. A very little tippie of that topples some folks over.’

‘You think so?’

‘I am sure of it. Have I not been a bride myself? I know about those sort of things by actual experience. I’ve gone through the operation myself. It is wery like being had up before the magistrate and convicted for life.’

Elijah was partly satisfied, and he began to eat; but his eyes turned restlessly at intervals to the door.

‘Don’t you put yourself out,’ murmured Mrs. De Witt as she leaned over his shoulder and emptied his glass of spirits. ‘Girls are much like scallops. If you want to have them tender and melting in your mouth, you must treat them with caution and patience. You take the scallops and put them first in lukewarm water, working up into a gentle simmer, and at last, but not under two hours, you toast them, and pepper and butter them, and then they are scalding and delicious. But if you go too fast to work with them, they turn to leather and will draw the teeth out of your gums if you bite into them. Girls must be treated just similarly, or you spoil them. You wouldn’t think it, looking at me, but my Moses, with all his faults, knew how to deal with me, and he got me that soft and yielding that he could squeeze me through his fingers like Mersea

mud. True as gospel. Fill your glass, Elijah ; it don't look hospitable to allow it to stand empty.'

When the lady in her red coat entered, holding triumphantly above her head a leg of boiled mutton, there was a general burst of delight.

'A hunter's dinner!' said Goppin.

'But where is the bride?' asked Grout. 'I want to drink health and a long family to her.'

'Glory ought to be here. Go up, Mistress Sharland, and bring her down. She has returned by this time,' said Rebow.

'I don't think she has,' said the old woman.

'I am sure of it ; go and look.'

The widow revisited the bedroom.

When she returned she said, 'No, Elijah ; Mehalah has not come back. She has taken off her bridal dress and laid it on the bed, and has put on her blue jersey, and I see she has taken with her a red cap.'

'She tore that to pieces.'

'She has been knitting a new cap this week,' said Mrs. Sharland.

'I like that ! She has done it to please me,' said Elijah, his eye twinkling. 'I loved her in

that ; and I hate to see her as she was tricked out to-day.'

'We are waiting for you to carve,' said Goppin.

'Don't forget we like fat,' said Grout.

'I say,' murmured Jabez Bunting, a store-keeper, 'look at the gravy, how it oozes out ; I'm fit to jump at the sight. Don't think we eat like ladies of quality, Rebow. Give us good large helpings, and the redder and rawer the better.'

'Some one,' said Elijah, 'tell Abraham Dowsing to go on the sea-wall and look out for Glory, and bring her home.'

'There's the boy what rowed me here,' said Mrs. De Witt. He is sitting outside on the step, and I'm throwing him the bits of skin and fat and gristle. I'll send him.'

'Really,' observed the Rev. Mr. Rabbit, after a fit of sneezing, 'the circumstance reminds the student of Holy Writ somewhat of Queen Vashti.'

'What do you mean?' asked Elijah abruptly.

'No offence, no offence meant,' gasped the curate, waxing very red ; 'I only thought your good lady was to-day like Queen Vashti.'

'Glory is like nobody,' said Rebow, with some pride. 'There never was, there never can be,

another Glory. I don't care who or what your Vashti was—Was she beautiful?' shortly interrupting himself.

'Did she bring property into the family!' asked Mrs. De Witt, leaning over Elijah's shoulder and emptying his tumbler. 'Elijah! you must replenish. Look hospitable, and keep the liquor flowing.'

'I really don't know,' said Mr. Rabbit.

'Then what do you mean by saying she was like my Glory?' asked Rebow angrily.

'I—I only suggested that there was a faint similarity in the circumstances, you know. King Ahasuerus made a great feast—as you have done.'

'Was there boiled mutton at it?' asked Grout.

'I really cannot say. It is not recorded.'

'Give me boiled mutton, a little underdone, and I ask for nothing more,' said Goppin.

'And,' went on the curate, 'he naturally wished his wife to be present. He wanted her to come down to be seen of his lords and princes.'

'Go on! Damn your sneezing. Put it off till you're preaching, and then no one will care,' said Rebow.

‘But,’ pursued the parson, when he had wiped his nose and eyes, and recovered breath after the fit, ‘Queen Vashti refused to come down.’

‘Well, what did the husband say to that?’ asked Elijah.

‘If he was a sensible man,’ said Goppin, ‘he cut into the mutton, and didn’t bother about she.’

‘You don’t know, neighbour, that it was a leg of mutton,’ said Grout. ‘It might have been sirloin.’

‘Sirloin!’ exclaimed Bunting; ‘I wouldn’t go ten yards to taste sirloin. There’s not enough on the bone, except fat.’

‘Go on,’ said Elijah to the curate. ‘How did the man—king, was he—take it?’

‘He dismissed Vashti, and took Esther to be his queen. But then,’ put in the frightened curate, thinking he had suggested a startling precedent, ‘Ahasuerus was not a Christian, and knew no better.’

‘Do you think,’ laughed Rebow, ‘that I would cast off my Glory for any other woman that ever was born? No, I would not. Let her do what she likes. She don’t care to associate with such as you. She holds herself above you.’

And she's right. She is one the like of whom does not exist. She has a soul stronger and more man-like than anyone of you. If she don't choose to come and guzzle here along of you, she's right. I like her for it.'

He flung himself back in his chair and drained his full glass.

'I ask you, Goppin! Did you ever see the equal of my Glory?'

'I can't say as ever I did, Rebow,' answered the farmer. 'I took the liberty to chuck her under the chin, and she up with the pitchfork out of my hand, and had like to have sent me to kingdom come, had not my good woman been nigh to hand, and run to the rescue. I hope you'll find her more placable when you come to ask a kiss.'

Elijah rubbed his hands, and laughed boisterously.

'Ha!' shouted he, 'that is my Glory! I tell you, Goppin, she'd have drove the prongs of the fork into your flesh as I dig this into the meat,' and he stabbed at the joint fiercely with his carving fork.

'I dare say,' grumbled the farmer, wincing and rubbing his leg. 'I'd for my part rather

have a more peaceable mate ; but there's no choosing fat beasts for others, as the saying goes.'

'What do you think of her?' asked Rebow, turning round with exultation, on Bunting and Grout.

'She came to my old woman,' said the latter, 'and asked her to take her in and give her work. She wanted to leave you.'

'She did,' exclaimed Rebow. 'And what did your old woman say to that?'

'She said she durstn't do it. She durstn't do it.'

'She durstn't do it!' echoed Elijah with a great laugh. 'That was fine. She durstn't do it!'

'No,' pursued Grout, 'without your leave.'

'And you wouldn't have dared to do it neither,' turning to Bunting, who shook his head.

'No, you would not dare. I'd like to see the man or woman in Salcott or Virley as would dare. I reckon there is none that knows me would make the venture. By God!' he burst forth. 'Where is the girl? I will have her here ; and I'm cursed if you shall not all stand on your legs, and drink to her health and happiness as the most splendid woman as ever was or shall be.'

‘Abraham Dowsing is at the door,’ said Mrs Sharland.

‘Come in, and say what you have to say before us all,’ called Elijah. ‘If it be anything about my Glory, say it out.’

‘She is gone off in her boat,’ said the old man ; ‘I saw her.’

‘Why did you not stop her then?’ asked Mrs. De Witt.

‘I stop her!’ repeated Abraham. ‘She is my mistress, and I a servant.’

‘That is right,’ said Elijah, ‘if she had taken a whip and lashed your back till it was raw, you couldn’t stop her. Where is she gone to?’

Abraham drew up his shoulders. ‘That’s her concern. It’s no odds to me. But I tell ye what, Master. Here are you feasting here, and we han’t had nothing extra with our wittles. I ask that we may eat and drink prosperity to you both, to her and you.’

‘You shall,’ said Elijah.

‘Stay,’ put in Mrs. De Witt. ‘What do you mean, you old barnacle, you? Let your superiors eat their fill first, and then you and the other men shall have what’s over. That’s fair. I shall manage for you. Go, Abraham.’

The supper drew to a close. Elijah drank a great deal. He was fretted, though he tried not to show it, by the absence of Glory. As more spirits were drunk and pipes were lighted in the hall, whilst the men of the farm fed in the kitchen, several of those present repeated their regret that she in whose honour they were assembled, the new mistress of the house in which they had met, had not deigned to show herself, and receive their good wishes and congratulations.

Rebow gulped down the contents of glass after glass.

Mrs. De Witt had seated herself with the rest, and was doing her best to make up for lost time, with the bottle.

‘Elijah!’ said she, ‘one or other must establish the mastery, either you or Glory. I did think she were a bit shy at first to come among us; but now the night is coming on and still she is away. I don’t deny that this ain’t civil. But then, she has lived all her life on the Ray, and can’t know the fashions of high society; and again, poor thing, it’s her first experience of matrimony. She will do better next time. Let us drink!’ said she, holding up her brimming glass, ‘to her profiting speedily by her experience, and next time we have

all of us the honour of attending at her wedding, may she do us the favour to respond.'

'Amen!' said the clerk, who was present.

'Go out some one, and see if she is coming,' said Rebow, his dark face burning with anger and drink. He could not, however, wait till the messenger returned, but left his guests, and went forth himself. He mounted the sea-wall, and turned his eyes down the creek; nothing was visible. He stood there, bareheaded, cursing, for a quarter of an hour, and then went back with knitted brows.

He found his guests preparing to depart.

'Go along!' he said; 'I want no congratulations; say nothing. Glory and I have a marriage different from other folks, as she and I are not like other folks. We must fight it out between us.'

He waved his guests away, with a rude impatient gesture.

Mrs. De Witt roused her boat-boy by kicking him off the steps—he had gone to sleep there—and then tumbling on top of him. She staggered up, tucked the lad under her arm, and marched off.

'If I meet Glory by the way, I'll send her

home, I'll be sure and mind it,' said she to Rebow as she departed.

He went in. He ordered Mrs. Sharland to go to her bed. The charwoman, had in for the day, cleared the table of all the glasses, save that of Elijah, and retired. He was left alone. He went to the back door and fastened it. Glory should not slink home that way without facing him. He seated himself in his armchair, and refilled his tumbler with spirits and water. He was very angry. She had deliberately insulted him before his guests, defied him in the face of the principal people of the parish. It would be spoken of, and he would be laughed at throughout the neighbourhood.

The black veins in his brow puffed out. A half-drunken, half-revengeful fire smouldered in his deep-set eyes. There was no lamp or candle burning in the room, but the twilight of midsummer filled it with a grey illumination.

He walked to the door, opened it, and looked out. The gulls were crying over the marsh, and the cattle were browsing in it. No Mehalah was to be seen.

'On my wedding day!' he muttered, and he resumed his seat. 'On that for which I have

worked, to which I have looked, for which I have thought and schemed, she flies in my face, she scorns me, she shows everyone that she hates me !’

His pipe was out, he threw it impatiently away.

‘ She does not know me, or she would not dare to do it. There is no one in all the neighbourhood dare defy me but she. Everyone fears me but she, for everyone knows me but she. Know me she must, know me she shall. There will be no wringing love out of her till she bends under me and fears me. She will never fear me till she knows all. She shall know that ; by God !’ he cried aloud, ‘ I will tell her that which shall make her shrink and fall, and whine at my feet ; and then I shall take her up, and drag her to my heart, and say, “ Ah, ha ! Glory ! think what a man you have gotten to-day, a man whom none can withstand. There is none like me, there is none will dare what I will dare ; You and I, I and you, are alone in the world. One must submit or there is no peace. You must learn to cower beneath me, or we shall fight for ever.” ’

He went out again upon the sea-wall, but saw nothing, and came back more angry. As he stood on his steps he heard from the path to Salcott a burst of merriment. He swore an ugly oath.

Those men, rolling home, were ridiculing him, keeping his marriage feast without the presence of his bride!

He flung himself again into his chair, and rocked himself in it. He could not sit there, tortured with anger and love, in the gloaming, doing nothing. He emptied the bottle, there was not a drop more in it, and he cast it in the hearth. Then he fetched down his old musket mounted in brass, and getting the vitriol bottle from the window, began to rub and polish the metal.

He wearied of that in the end. His mind could not be drawn off Glory, and wondering where she was, and why she had thus gone away.

‘I love her,’ he muttered, as he replaced his gun on the nails above the chimney-piece, ‘but yet I hate her. My very heart is like Grimshoe with love and hate warring together, and neither gets the mastery. I could clasp her to my breast, but I could tear out her heart with my nails, because it will not love me.’ He rocked himself in his seat savagely, and his breath came fast : ‘We must work the riddle out between us. We can get no help, no light from any others ; she and I, and I and she, are each other’s best friends and worst foes.’

A firm hand was on the door, it was thrown open, and in the grey light stood Mehalah.

‘Where have you been?’ asked Elijah, hardly able to speak, so agitated with fury and disappointed love was he.

‘I have been,’ she said composedly, ‘on the Ray, sitting there and dreaming of the past.’

‘Of the past!’ shouted Rebow. ‘You have been dreaming of George?’

‘Yes, I have.’

‘I thought it, I knew you were,’ he yelled. ‘Come here, my wife.’

‘I am not your wife. I never will be your wife, except in name. I told you so. I can not, and I will not love you. I can not, and I will not, be ought to you but a housekeeper, a servant. I have taken your name to save mine, that is all.’

‘That is all because you love George De Witt.’

‘George De Witt is dead.’

‘I don’t care whether he be dead or not, you think that he is your double. I tell you as I have told you before, he is not. I am.’

‘I will not listen to more of this,’ she said in a hard tone. ‘Let me pass, let me go to my room.’

‘I will not let you pass,’ he swore; the breath came through his nostrils like the snorting of a

frightened horse ; ‘ I will not. Hear me, Glory, my own Glory ! hear me you shall.’ He grasped her arms between the elbow and shoulder with his iron hands, and shook her savagely.

‘ Listen to me, Glory, you must and shall. You do not love me, Glory, because you do not fear me. The dog whom I beat till it howls with torture creeps up to me and licks my hand. A woman will never love her equal, but she will worship her superior. You have shown me to-day that you think yourself on a level with me. You have donned again your cap of liberty,’ he raised one hand to her head, plucked off the cap and cast it on the floor, ‘ thinking that now you have taken me before the world, you have broken my power over you. You do not know me, Glory ! you do not know me ! Listen to me !’ Through the twilight she could see his fierce eyes flaring at her, her hair was disturbed by the hot blasts of his labouring lungs. His fingers that held her twitched convulsively as he spoke.

‘ Listen to me, Glory ! and know me and respect me. I am no more to be escaped than fate. I am mighty over you as a Providence. You may writhe and circumvent, but I meet you at every turn, and tread you down whenever you

think to elude me. Listen to me, Glory!’ He paused, and drew a long breath; ‘Listen, I say, to me. Glory! how did you lose your money that night that Abraham Dowsing sold your sheep? I feel you stirring and starting in my hands. Yes, I took it. You went out with George De Witt, and left the purse on the table. When your mother left the room, I took the money. You may have it back now when you like, now that I have you. I took it—you see why. To have you in my power.’

‘Coward and thief!’ gasped Mehalah.

‘Ah! call me names if you like; you do not know me yet, and how impossible it is to resist me. You thought when you had got the money again, from George, that you had escaped me.’

‘Stay!’ exclaimed Mehalah. ‘It was you,’ with compressed scorn, ‘that fired on George and me in the marsh.’

‘I fired at him, not at you; and had you not changed the place of the lanthorn in the boat, I should have shot him.’

The girl shuddered in his hands.

‘I feel you,’ he said with savage exultation. ‘You are beginning to know me now, and to tremble. When you know all, you will kneel to

me as to your God, as almighty over your destiny, irresistible, able to crush and kill whom I will, and to conquer where I will. George De Witt stood in my way to you.'

Mehalah's heart leaped and then stood still. Her pulse ceased to beat. She seemed to be hanging in space, seeing nothing, feeling nothing, hearing only, and only the words of the man before her.

'He left Mersea City one night. He left it in my boat with me.'

He paused, rejoicing in her horror at this revelation of himself to her.

'Have you not a question to ask me, "Where he now is? What I know of him?"'

No—she could not speak, she could not even breathe.

'Do you remember when you came on Michaelmas Day to pay me my rent, how you heard and saw my mad brother in the cell there below?'

He paused again, and then chuckled. 'The poor wretch died and I buried him there. I brought George here, I made him drunk, and chained him in my brother's place, and he went mad with his captivity in darkness and cold and nakedness.'

The blood spouted from her heart through every artery. She tried to cry but could not, she strove to escape his hands, she was unable. She panted, and her eyes stood open, fixed as those of a corpse, staring before her.

‘You lost your sheep,’ he went on, with exultation. ‘I took them. I took them to rob you of every chance of paying me, and keeping clear of me.’

She did not hear him. She cared nothing about sheep. She was thinking of George, of his imprisonment and madness.

‘At last, when I feared that after all you might slip from me by means of that cripple at Wyvenhoe, I did more. I watched you on New Year’s Eve ; I waited for you to go to sleep, that I might fire your house. You did better than I had thought, you went out ; and then I set the Ray Farm in flames. What cared I for the loss ? It was nothing. By it I gained you. I secured you under my roof, by burning you out of the shelter of your own.’ He swelled with pride. ‘You know me now, Glory ! Now think you that escape from me is possible ? No, you do not, you cannot. I hedge you in, I undermine the ground you tread. I saw away the posts that

hold up the roof above your head. You know now what I am, irresistible, almighty, as far as you are concerned, your fate incarnate. And I know you. I know that you are one who will never yield till you have found a man who is mightier in will and in power than you; those who have fought are best friends after the struggle, when each knows his own strength and the full measure of the resistance of the other. We have had one wrestle, and I have flung you at every round; you in your pride, have stood up again, and wiped the blood from your heart, and the tears from your eyes, and tried another fall with me; but now, Glory, you have tried your last. Hitherto you fought not knowing the extent of my power, thinking that I put forth my full might when I spoke, but that I had no strength to act. Now you see what I can do, and what I have done, and you will abandon the fruitless battle. Glory! Glory! Come to my heart. You fear me now, and fear is the first step leading to love. Glory! my own Glory!' his voice faltered, and his fingers worked, 'I love you madly. I will do and dare all for you. I will live for you and for nothing in the world but you. Never, till this day in the church have I so much as held your hand.

Never till this moment, Glory ! have I held you to my heart, never till this moment have I felt it bounding against mine, never till this moment, have I kissed those dear, dear lips, as I shall now.'

He drew her to him. He unloosed his hands to throw his arms round her. She felt them closing on her like a hoop of iron, she felt his heart beating like the strokes of a blacksmith with his hammer ; his burning breath was on her cheek. He ! He kiss her ! She lie on that heart which had schemed and carried out the destruction of her George.

She cried out. She found her tongue. 'Let go ! I hate you as I never hated you before ! I hate you as a mad dog, as a poisonous adder ! Let go !' She writhed and slipped partly away.

'Never till I have held you to my breast and kissed you,' he said.

'That never, never !' she gasped. She got her hands on his breast and forced his arms asunder behind her.

'Ha, ha ! strong,' he laughed, 'but not strong as I.' He gripped her wrists and bent her arms back. She threw herself on the ground, he drew her up. She flung herself against the chair, crushing his hand against the chimney-piece, so that he

let go with it for an instant. She groped about with her free hand, in the dark, for some weapon, she grasped something. He cursed her for the pain she had given him, and attempted again to seize her hand. In a moment she had struck him—him the coward assailant, him the thief, him the murderer—between the brows with the weapon her hand had taken. It was a blow with her whole force. There followed a crash of glass, then a sense as of her hand being plunged into fire. Then a shriek loud, tearing through roof and wall, loud, agonized, as only a man or a horse can utter in supreme moments of torture ; and Rebow fell on the floor, writhing like a worm, with his hands over his face and eyes.

CHAPTER X.

IN THE DARKNESS.

DAY by day Elijah Rebow lay, or sat, in the darkened oak parlour with his eyes bandaged, a prey to wrath, pain, despair. The vitriol from the broken vial had got into his eyes, and there was reason to fear had blinded them.

He was obliged to have the burning balls kept from the light, but he raged under the obligation. He wanted to see, he could not be patient under restraint. He could ill understand that in all things he might not have his way, even in such a matter as this. He chafed also at having been conquered by Glory. That she should have defied and beaten him, and beaten him in such a crushing manner, cut his pride to the quick.

None knew how the accident had occurred save himself and Mehalah. To the doctor he had merely said that in getting the vitriol bottle from

the shelf, it had fallen and broken on his forehead.

Mrs. Sharland remained in as complete ignorance of the truth as the rest, and her lamentations and commiserations, poured on Elijah and her daughter, angered him and humiliated her. Mehalah had suffered in mind agonies equal in acuteness to those endured in body by Elijah.

Horror and hatred of herself predominated. She had destroyed, by one outburst of passion, the eyesight of a man, and wrecked his life. What henceforth for thirty or forty years could life be to Rebow?—to one who could not endure existence without activity? She had rendered him in a moment helpless as a babe, and dependent on herself for everything. She must attend to his every want, and manage the farm and his business for him. By a stroke, their relative positions were reversed. The wedding night had produced a revolution in their places of which she could not have dreamed. She felt at once the burden of the responsibilities that came upon her. She was called upon by those on the farm to order and provide for everything connected with it. She had to think for the farm, and think for the master into whose position she had forced her way.

She hated herself for her rash act. She hated the man whom she had mutilated, but more herself. If by what she had done she had in one sense made herself master, in another she had cast herself into bondage. By the terrible injury she had inflicted on Rebow she had morally bound herself to him for life to repair that injury by self-devotion. Had it been possible for her to love him, even to like him, this would have been light to her, with her feminine instinct, but as it was not possible, the slavery would be inexpressibly painful.

Love will hallow and lighten the most repulsive labours, the most extreme self-sacrifice, but when there is no love, only abhorrence, labour and self-sacrifice crush mentally and morally. She must bear the most fierce and insulting reproaches without an attempt to escape them, she had in part deserved them. These she could and would endure, but his caresses!—no! however deeply she might have sinned against him, however overflowing her pity for his helpless condition might be, she could not tolerate affection from the man who by his own confession merited her profound loathing. He had taken an unoffending man, and had imprisoned him and blinded his reason

by cruelty ; it seemed to her as if Providence had used her hand to exact a just retribution on Rebow by condemning him to an equally miserable condition. The recompense was justly meted, but would that it had been dealt by another hand !

In one particular she was blameless, and able to excuse herself. She had acted without intent to do bodily harm, and in ignorance of the weapon she had used. She had been carried away by the instinct of self-preservation, and had taken up what was readiest at hand, without a wish to do more than emancipate herself from the grasp of the man she detested. He had brought the consequences on his own eyes by his own act.

But though she quite recognised that he had done this, and that he richly deserved the consequences, yet she could not relieve her conscience from the gnawings of self-reproach, from the scalding blush of shame at having executed a savage, unwomanly vengeance on the man who had wronged her. Had her victim been a woman and a rival, she would perhaps have gloried in her act ; but the female mind is perverse in its twists and complexion, and it will tingle with pain for having hurt a man, however little that man may be loved, when it would plume itself for having done

the same to a woman who has been a friend. A woman must think and act rightly towards a man, but can do neither towards one of her own sex.

Mehalah's bosom was a prey to conflicting emotions. She pitied Elijah, and she pitied George. Her deep pity for George forced her to hate his torturer, and grudge him no suffering to expiate his offence. When she thought of what George De Witt must have endured in the vault, of his privations there, of the gradual darkening and disturbance of his faculties, and then of how Elijah had stepped between him and her, and spoiled their mutual dream of happiness, and ruined both their lives, the hot blood boiled in her heart, and she felt that she could deal Rebow the stroke again, deliberately, knowing what the result must be, as a retributive act; but when she heard him, as now, pacing the oak parlour, and in his blindness striking against the walls, her pity for him mounted and overlapped her wrath. Moreover, she was perplexed about the story of George's imprisonment. There was something in it she could not reconcile with what she knew. Elijah had confessed that on the night of George's disappearance he had enticed the young man to Red Hall, made him drunk or drugged him, and then

chained him in the vault, in the place of his own brother who had died. It was Rebow and not De Witt who, that same night, had appeared at her window, driven in the glass and flung the medal at her feet. But was this possible? She knew at what hour George had left the Mussets' shop, and she knew about the time when the medal had been cast on the floor before her. It was almost incredible that so much had taken place in the interval. It was no easy row between Red Hall and the Ray, to be accomplished in half an hour.

Surely, also, had George De Witt been imprisoned below, he could have found some means to make himself heard, to communicate with the men about the farm, in the absence of Rebow. Would a few months in that dark damp cell derange the faculties of a sane man?

Mehalah lifted the trap and went down. The vault was a cellar not below the soil, but with floor level with the marsh outside, or only slightly beneath. It had a door fastened from within by a bolt, but also provided with a lock; and there was the circular window already described; the shutter had not been replaced, and the sunlight entered, and made the den less gloomy and horrible than

Mehalah had conceived it to be. She found the staple to which the chain had been attached, away from the door and the window. It was obvious how the maniac had got loose. The chain had been attached to the staple by a padlock. Elijah sometimes unlocked this, when he was cleaning the straw from the cell, and supplying fresh litter. He had carelessly turned the key in the lock, and left it unfastened. The madman had found this out after Rebow was gone, and had taken advantage of the circumstance to break out at the window. The chain and padlock, with the key in it, were now hung over the fireplace in the hall, mocking the inscription below ‘When I take hold, I hold fast.’

Mehalah seated herself in the window of the hall, and took up some needlework. Elijah was still pacing the parlour and beating against the opposite walls, muttering curses when he struck the oak panels. Presently she heard him groping along the walls for the door, and stumbling over chairs. He turned the handle and entered the hall.

He stood before her in the doorway of the darkened chamber, with extended quivering hands, his head bowed, his eyes covered with a thick

bandage. He wore his red plush waistcoat and long brown coat. His dark hair was ruffled and stood up like rushes over a choked drain. He turned his head aside and listened. Mehalah held her breath.

‘You are there,’ he said. ‘Although you try to hide from me, I know you are there and watching me. I am in the dark but I can see. I can see you always and everywhere, with your eyes—great angry brown eyes—on me, and your hand lifted to strike me into endless night.’

Mehalah did not speak. Why should she? She could say nothing that could do either any good.

‘Have you put the hot fire to your tongue and scorched it out as you have put it to my eyes?’ he asked. ‘Can’t you speak? Must I sit alone in darkness, or tramp alone up and down in black hell, feeling the flames dance in my eye-sockets, but not seeing them, and have no one to speak to, no one to touch, no one to kick, and beat, and curse? Go out and fetch me a dog that I may torture it to death and laugh over the sport. I must do something. I cannot tramp, tramp, and strike my head and shoulders against the walls till I am bruised and cut, with no one to speak to, or speak to me. By heaven! it is bad enough in Grimshoe

with two in the shiphold mangling each other, but there is excitement and sport in that. It is worse in that wooden hold yonder, for there I am all alone.'

He stopped speaking, and began to feel round the room. He came to the chimney and put his fingers into the letters of the inscription. 'Ha!' he muttered, 'When I lay hold I hold fast. I laid hold of you Mehalah, but I have not let go yet, though I have burned my fingers.'

This was the first time he had called her by her christian name. She was surprised.

'Mehalah!' he repeated, 'Mehalah!' and then laughed bitterly to himself. 'You are no more my Glory. There is no Glory here for me; unless, in pity for what a ruin you have made, you take me to your heart and love me. If you will do that I will pardon all, I will not give a thought to my eyes. I can still see you standing in the midst of the fire, unhurt like a daughter of God. I do not care. I shall always see you there, and when the fire goes out and only black ashes remain, I shall see you there shining like a lamp in the night, always the same. I do not care how many years may pass, how old you may wax, whether you may become bent and broken with infirmities, I shall always see my Glory with her

rich black shining hair, her large brown eyes, and form as elastic and straight as a pinetree. I shall see the blue jersey and the red cap and scarlet skirt.' He raised his hands and wrung them in the air above his head; 'What do I care for other sights? These long flat marshes have nothing beautiful in them. The sea is not here what it is on other coasts, foaming, colour-shifting like a peacock's neck; here it is of one tone and grey, and never tosses in waves, but creeps in like a thief over the shallow mud-flat, and babbles like a dotard over the mean shells and clots of weed on our strand. There is nothing worth seeing here. I do not heed being blinded, so long as I can see you, and that not you nor all your vitriol can extinguish. Heat skewers white hot in the fire, and drive them in at the eye-sockets through all obstruction into the brain, and then perhaps you will blind me to that vision. Nothing less can do it. Pity me and love me, and I forgive all.'

He crept past the chimney-piece and was close to the window. He touched Mehalah with one hand, and in a moment had her fast with both.

'I cannot love you,' she said, 'but I pity you from the depth of my soul, and I shall never forgive myself for what I have done.'

‘Look here!’ he snatched his bandages away and cast them down. ‘This is what you have done. I have hold of you, but I cannot see you with my eyes. I am looking into a bed of wadding, of white fleeces with red ochre smears in them, rank dirty old fleeces unscoured,—that is all I see. I suppose it is the window and the sunshine. I feel the heat of the rays; I cannot see them save as streaks of wool.’

‘Elijah!’ exclaimed the girl, ‘let me bandage your eyes again. You were ordered to keep all light excluded.’

‘Bah! I know well enough that my eyesight is gone. I know what you have done for me. Do you think that a few days in darkness can mend them? I know better. Vitriol will eat away iron, and the eyes are softer than iron. You knew that when you poured it on them.’

‘I never intended to do you the harm,’ said Mehalah passionately, and burst into tears. He listened to her sobbing with pleasure.

‘You are sorry for me.’

‘I am more than sorry. I am crushed with shame and grief for what I have done.’

‘You will love me now, Mehalah.’

She shook her head and one of her tears fell

on his hand ; he raised his hand and put it to his eyes ; then sighed. ‘I thought one such drop would have restored them whole as before. It would, had there been sweetness in it, but it was all bitter. There was only anger with self and no love for me. I must bide on in blackness.’ He put his hands on each side of her head, twisted his thumbs resting on her cheek-bones, and her unrestrained tears ran over them.

He stood quite still.

‘This is the best medicine I could get,’ he said ; ‘better nor all doctor’s messes. To listen to your heart flowing over, to feel your warm tears trickle, does me good. In spite of everything, Glory ! I must love you, and yet, Mehalah ! I have every cause to hate you. I have made you, who were nothing, my wife, mistress of my house and estate, with a property and position above everyone else in Salcott and Virley, equal to any of the proud yeomen’s wives on Mersea Isle. I have made a home for your mother, and in return you have plunged me in eternal night, and deny me your love.’

‘Let us not recriminate,’ said Mehalah through her tears, ‘or I should have enough to charge you with. I never sought to be your wife. You

drove me into the position in spite of my aversion to it ; in spite of all my efforts to escape. You have wounded me in a cruel and cowardly manner past forgiveness. You have ruined my life and all my prospects of happiness. George ——’

He shook her furiously.

‘I will not listen to that name,’ he said through his teeth.

‘You could bear to hold him in chains there below,’ she answered.

‘You said, Let us not recriminate, and you pour a torrent of recriminations over me,’ he gasped. ‘If I have wronged you, you have redressed all with one vial of vitriol in the eyes, where man is most sensitive. With that firejuice you purged away all the past wrongs, I expiated in that liquid flame all the evil I had done you. You don’t know what I have suffered. You have had no such experience of pain as to imagine the tortures I have undergone. If the anguish were all, it would be enough atonement ; but it is not all. There is the future before me, a future of night. I shall have to trust to someone to do everything for me, to be eyes, and hands, and

feet to me. Whom can I trust? How do I know that I shall not be deserted, and left to die in my darkness, a prey to ravenous men? If you loved me, then I could lean on you and be at peace. But you do not love me, and you will leave me when it suits your pleasure.'

'No, Elijah,' said Mehalah sadly; 'that I never will do. I have robbed you of your sight. I did it unwittingly, in self-defence, perhaps also in anger at knowing how cruelly, wickedly, cowardly you had behaved to me and to another whom I loved.'

'Whom you love still!' with a cry of rage.

'One whom I loved,' repeated Mehalah sadly; 'and I must atone for my mad act as far as lies in my power. I will stay by you. I will never forsake you.'

'Listen to me, Mehalah,' said Elijah with concentrated vehemence; 'you know what was said—that the person you loved went out in a boat and was lost. The body was never found. Should the man turn up again.'

'That is impossible.'

'I don't care for impossibilities. I live now in a dream-world where there is no line drawn

between the possible and the impossible. Should he reappear, what then?'

'Still I would remain at my post of duty,' said the girl, humouring his fancy.

'The post of duty, not of love,' he muttered.

'I said duty,' she replied; 'I will never leave that.'

His thumbs twitched on her cheek-bones and worked their way to the corners of her eyes; she sharply withdrew her head.

He laughed. 'You thought I was going to gouge your eyes out with my thumbnails,' he said, 'that I was going to repay you in kind. No, I was not; but should the dead return to life and reclaim you, I may do it. You cannot, you shall not escape me. You and I, and I and you must sink or swim together. Say again, Mehalah, that you will stand by me.'

'I promise it you, Elijah, I promise it you here solemnly, before God.' She sank on her knees. 'I have brought you unwittingly into darkness, and in that darkness I will hold to you and will cherish you.'

'Ha!' he shouted. 'At the altar you refused to swear that. To love, cherish, and obey is

what the parson tried to make you say; but all you swore to was to obey, you denied the other, and now you take oath to cherish. The wheel of fate is turning, and you will come in time to love where you began to obey and went on to cherish.'

CHAPTER XI.

THE FORGING OF THE RING.

MRS. SHARLAND was failing. The excitement of the marriage had roused her to activity, but when that was over she relapsed, her energy evaporated, and she took to her bed with the avowed intention of not leaving it again, except for a christening in the family, till carried to her grave. She did not understand Mehalah, she fretted because the arrangements after the eventful day remained the same as before ; her daughter shared her room and kept as much away from Elijah as was possible, showed him none of the love of a wife to her husband, and was distressed when spoken to by her new name.

‘You are either Mistress Rebow or you are not,’ said the old woman peevishly to her daughter one night, in their room, ‘and if you are not, then I don’t understand what the

ceremony in the church was for. You treat Elijah Rebow as coldly and indifferently as if he were naught to you but master, and you to him were still hired servant. I don't understand your goings on.'

'He and I understand each other, that is enough,' answered Mehalah. 'I have married him for his name and for nothing else. In no other light will I regard him than as a master: I told him when I agreed to go to church with him that I would be his no further than the promise to obey went; I take his name to save mine,—that is all. He is not my husband, and never shall be, in any other way. I will serve him and serve him devotedly, but not give him my love. That I cannot give. I gave my heart away once for all, and it has not been restored to me.'

'That is all nonsense,' said Mrs. Sharland. 'Didn't I love Charles Pettican, and weren't we nigh coming to a declaration, only a fit of the ague shivers cut it short? I married your father, and loved him truly as a good wife and not as a hired servant, for all that.'

'Elijah and I understand each other,' answered Mehalah. 'I suppose there is something of truth in what he says over and over again, that he and

I are different from others, and that there's none can understand us but our two selves.'

'Then you are made for one another.'

'So he says, but I will not believe it. No. That cannot be. Some have peace and happiness drop into their lap, others have to fight their way to it, and that is our fate. But that we shall find it in each other, that I never will admit. In George——' she covered her eyes, and left her sentence unfinished.

The charge of Mrs. Sharland was, to some extent, unjust. Mehalah did attend to Elijah with as much care and as assiduously as she was able, considering the amount of work which had devolved upon her. Her mother was ill and in bed, Elijah helpless. She had to see after and direct everything about the farm and house, beside ministering to the two invalids. Consequently she was unable to devote much time to Elijah, but whenever she had a few moments of relief from work she devoted them to him. She took her needlework either to him in the oak parlour, or brought him into the hall. She had now somewhat lightened her labours by engaging a char-woman, and was therefore more able than before to be with Rebow and her mother. Each com-

plained if left long alone, and she had much difficulty in portioning her time between them. She tried, but tried in vain, to induce her mother to make an effort and come down stairs, so that she might sit with both at once ; this would save her from distraction between two exacting and conflicting claims, and some restraint would be placed on the intercourse between Rebow and herself by the presence in the room of a third party.

Elijah was not entirely blinded, he was plunged not in darkness but in mist. He could see objects hazily, when near ; he could distinguish figures, but not faces, when within a few yards of him, but nothing distant. The wall and a black cloud on the horizon were equally remote to his vision.

He wandered about, with a stick, and visited his cattle sheds and workmen ; or sat under the south wall of his house in the sun. The pump was there, and to it Mehalah sometimes came. He listened for her step. He could distinguish her tread from that of the charwoman. He took no notice of this woman, though she came up to him occasionally and said a few commiserating words.

The men thought that he was gentler in his affliction than he had been before. He did not

curse them, as had been his wont. He asked about the cattle, and the farm, and went his way. Mehalah also noticed that he was less fierce; she was able also to attribute this softening to its right cause, to her own influence. He was, to some extent, happy, because she was often with him, sought him instead of shunning him, spoke to him kindly, instead of rebuffing him when he addressed her, and let him know and feel that she thought of him, and was endeavouring to make him comfortable in his great deprivation.

As he sat in the sun and looked up at the bright orb, which he saw only as a nebulous mass of light, she was ever present before his inward eye, she in her pride and beauty. He did not think; he sat hour by hour, simply looking at her—at the image ever before him, and listening for her step or voice. An expression of almost content stole across his strongly marked features, but was occasionally blurred and broken by an uneasy, eager, enquiring look, as if he were peering and hearkening for something which he dreaded. In fact, he was not satisfied that George De Witt would never reappear. Had he been set at rest on this point, he could have been happy.

Mehalah was touched by his patience, his for-

givenness of the irreparable wrong she had done him. He had said that if she loved him he would pardon all. He was ready to do this at a less price; though he craved for her love, he was contented, at least for the present, with her solicitude. He had been accustomed to open hostility and undisguised antipathy. Now that he met with consideration and tenderness from her, he became docile, and a transformation began to be operated in his nature. Love him, she could not, but she felt that but for what he had done to George, she could regard him without repugnance. Pity might ripen into friendship. Into a deeper and more rich feeling it never could, for he had barred the way to this possibility by his dealing with De Witt.

She ventured occasionally to approach the subject, but it always produced such agitation in the manner of Rebow that she was obliged to desist from seeking explanation of the particulars which perplexed her. The slightest allusion to George De Witt troubled the master of Red Hall, made his face darken, and brought on an access of his old violence, from which he did not recover for a day or two.

Mrs. De Witt came to see him.

‘Lawk a day!’ she said; ‘What a job to find you in this predicament!’

He turned his whitened eyes on her, with a nervous twitch in the muscles and a tremour of the lips, ‘Well! What news?’

‘News!’ echoed the lady; ‘Dear sackalive! who’d expect to find news in Mersea, you might as well drag for oysters in a horsepond.’

He was satisfied, and let her talk on without attending to her.

A few days later, he called the charwoman to him as she was going to the pump.

‘What is your name?’

‘Susan Underwood. I’m a married woman, with three small children, and another on its way.’

He fumbled in his pocket, and took out a crown.

‘Any news?—from Mersea, I mean.’

‘I don’t come from Mersea. Thank your honour all the same.’

‘But if there were news there it would get to Virley or Salcott, or wherever you live.’

‘It would be sure. I did hear,’ she said, ‘that Farmer Pooley has been a wisiting a little more nor he ought at widow Siggars’ cottage, her

as has a handsome daughter, and so, they do say, has Farmer Pudney; and the other day they met there, and was so mad each to find the other, that the one up with his hunting whip and the other with his bible and knocked each other down, and each had to be carried home on a shutter.'

'Go and tell those tales to the old woman upstairs. I have no patience to listen to them. That's the sort of garbage women feed on, as maggots on rotten meat.'

'But it is true.'

'Who cares whether true or not? It is all the same to me. Has anyone arrived at Mersea?'

'Not yet, sir, but they do say that the parson's wife has expectations.'

'Go back to the kitchen,' growled Elijah, and relapsed into his dream.

A few minutes after, Mehalah came out, and seated herself on the bench beside him. She was knitting. He put out his hand and felt her, and smiled. He raised his hand to her head.

'Glory! when you wear the red cap in the sun I know it, I see a scarlet light like a poppy, and it pleases me. Let me hold the ball, then I can feel every stitch you take with your fingers.'

She put the wool gently into his palm; and

began to talk to him concerning the farm. He listened, and spoke in a tone and with a manner different from his habit formerly.

Presently his hand stole up the thread, and he caught her fingers and drew her hand down on her lap. Her first impulse was to snatch it away, but she conquered it, and let him feel over her hand without a movement of dislike.

‘You have not yet a ring,’ he said; ‘you have no gold wedding circle like other married women.’

‘Our union is unlike all others,’ she said.

‘That is true; but you must wear my ring. I shall not be happy till you do. I shall think you will cast me off unless I can feel the ring that has no ending round your finger. Where is the link with which I married you?’

‘I have it here,’ she said; ‘I have not cast it off, and I shall not cast you off. I have fastened it by a string and carry it in my bosom.’

He seemed pleased. ‘You wear it for my sake.’

‘I wear it,’ she replied, truthfully, ‘because I took a solemn oath on that day, and I will not go from it. What I undertook that I will fulfil, neither more nor less. What I did not promise I will not do, what I did undertake that I will execute.’

‘And you bear the ring in your bosom—’

‘As a reminder to me of my promise. I will not be false to myself or to you. Do not press me further. You know what to expect and what not to expect. If I could love you I would; but I cannot. I did not promise that then and I will not promise it now, for I know the performance is out of my power.’

‘You must wear the wedding ring on your finger.’

‘I cannot wear this link, it is too large.’

‘I will get you a gold ring, such as other women wear.’

‘No. I cannot wear a lie, the gold ring belongs to the perfect marriage, to the union of hearts. It befits not ours.’

‘You are right,’ he said, and sighed. He still held her hand; she made a slight effort to withdraw it, but he clasped the hand the tighter.

‘Let me touch and hold you, Glory,’ he said. ‘Remember I can no more see you, except mistily. You must allow me some compensation. I know what you are now, sitting here in the sun, with your hair full of rich coppery gleams, and your eyes full of light and darkness at once, and your cheek like a ripe apricot. I know what you are,

splendid, noble, as no other girl in the whole world; but you have shut my eyes, that I may not see you, so allow me, at least, to feel you.' He paused. Then he went on: 'You are right, our union is unlike any other, as you and I are different from all others in the world. The married life of some is smooth and shining and rustless like the gold, but ours is quite contrary, it is rough and dark and full of blisters and canker. It may be different some day—' he turned his dim eyes enquiringly at her, 'but not now, not now. Nevertheless as the ring is without an end so is our union. Give me the link of iron, Glory, and come with me to the forge. I will beat out a bit of the metal into a ring, one small enough and light enough for you to wear.'

He got up, and holding her hand, bade her lead him to the forge.

Near the bake-house was a small smithy, fitted up with all necessary appliances. Rebow was a skilful workman at the anvil, and shod his own horses, and made all that was needed in iron for the house and farm.

Mehalah conducted him to the shop, and brought fire from the kitchen for the forge, she worked the bellows and blew the fire into

size and strength, whilst Elijah raked the coals together.

‘Where is the link, Glory?’ he asked, and went up to her. He put his hand to her neck, before she did, and drew out of her bosom something.

‘That is not the link, Elijah,’ she said; ‘It is my medal—the medal that—’

He uttered a fierce cry, and wrenching it off, dashed it on the ground. He would have stamped on it had he been able to see it.

Mehalah’s cheek flushed, but she said nothing. She saw where the coin had rolled. She stooped, picked it up, impressed a kiss upon it, and hid it once more in her bosom.

‘Here is the iron link,’ she said; he took it from her sullenly.

The flame gleamed up blue above the wetted coal, and glared out white through the crevices in the clot, as the bellows panted, and Rebow drew the coals together or broke into the glaring mass with an iron rod.

‘I heard a preacher once take as his text,’ said he, ‘Our God is a consuming fire; and he told all in the chapel that this was writ in Scripture and therefore must be true to the letter, for

God wrote it himself, and He knew what he was better than any man. He said that fire warms and illumines at a distance, but if you come too close it dazzles and burns up. And he told us it was so with God. You can't keep too far off of Him to be comfortable and safe; the nearer you get, the worse it is for you; and to my thinking that is Hell, when you get sucked into the very core of the fire in the heart of God. You must be consumed because you are not divine, fire alone can live in fire; most folks are clay and water, and they are good enough, they get light and warmth, but when they die they burn up like this dock of coke. But there are other folk, like you and me, Glory! who are made of fire and clay; it takes but a word or a thought to make us roar and blaze and glow like this furnace. There is passion in us—and that is a spark of the divine. I do not care what the passion be, love or hate, or jealousy or anger, if it be hot and red and consuming so that it melts and burns all that opposes it, that fiery passion is of God and will live, live on for ever, in the central heart and furnace, which is God. When you and I die, Glory, and are sucked into the great fiery whirlpool, we shall not be burnt up altogether, but

intensified. If I love you with fiery passion here I shall love you with fiery passion ten thousand times hotter hereafter; my passion will turn to glaring white heat, and never go out for all everlasting, for it will be burning, blazing in God who is eternal. If you hate me, you will be whirled in, and your fury fanned and raked into a fiery phrenzy which will rage on for ages on ages, and cannot go out, for it will be burning in the everlasting furnace of God. If I love, and you hate with infinite intensity for an infinity of time—that is Hell. But if you love and I love, our love grows hotter and blazes and roars and spurts into one tongue, cloven like the tongues at Pentecost, twain yet one, and that is Heaven. My love eating into yours and encircling it, and yours into mine, and neither containing nor consuming the other, but going on in growing intensity of fiery fury of love from everlasting to everlasting, that is Heaven of Heavens.’

He was heating the link, held between the teeth of long shanked pincers, and then withdrawing it, and forging it on the anvil as he spoke.

‘Glory!’ he said; ‘Tell me, you do not hate me?’

She hesitated.

‘Glory!’ he repeated, and laid hammer and pincer on the anvil, and leaned his head towards her, as she shrank into the dark corner by the bellows, ‘Glory! tell me, you do not hate me.’

‘Elijah,’ she said; ‘I must be candid with you. When I think of what, by your own confession, you have done to him whom I loved more than all the world——’

He raised his hammer and brought it down on the link, cutting it in half, and sending one fiery half across the smithy.

‘When I think of what you have done to him, I feel that I do hate you, and that I have every cause and right to hate you. I could forgive everything else. I have turned over in my mind all that you have done to me, the cruel way in which you worked till you had brought me within your power, the heartless way in which you got my good name to be evil spoken of, and drove me out of self-defence to take your hand before the altar of God, I have thought of all this, and I feel that my act—unintentional though it was—yet my act, which has blinded you, has expiated all those offences. You have wronged me, and I have wronged you. I have ruined your life, but you have also ruined mine. We are quits so far.

You have my frank forgiveness. I blot out all the past, as far as it concerns me, from my memory. It shall no more rankle in my heart. You have shown me a generous forgiveness of my misdeed, and I would imitate you. But what you did to George is not to be expiated. You sinned against him more terribly, more wickedly than against me, and he alone can pardon you. That I cannot forgive ; and for that crime I must still hate you.'

He stood trembling,—a strange weakness came over him—he was not angry, savage, morose ; he seemed a prey to fear and uncertainty.

'Tell me, tell me truly, Glory ! Does that alone prevent you from loving me ? Had I never done what I said I had done, could you love me ?'

'I do not say that,' she replied. 'As I have told you before, I gave my heart once for all to George De Witt. I never could love you with my fresh full heart, as a woman should love her husband, but I feel that I could like you as a friend. I do pity you. God knows how bitterly I have suffered from remorse for what I did unwittingly, and how sincere I am in my repentance and desire to deal tenderly and truly by you,

Elijah. I feel sometimes as if I could like you ; I do acknowledge that you and I stand apart from others, and alone can understand each other ; but then that great crime of your life against George rises up before me and drives back my rising compassion.'

Rebow worked again at the link, beating out the fragment into a wire, and cutting it again. He was thinking whilst he wrought.

' Sooner or later,' he muttered at last, ' all will out.'

He worked with difficulty, and slowly, as he could not see, and was obliged to feel the iron, and cool it repeatedly to ascertain whether it was as he desired it.

' Look here, Glory !' he said, ' when iron is taken from the smelting furnace it is crystalline and brittle ; there is no thread and texture in it, but we burn it and beat it, and as we work we beat our stubborn purpose into the metal, and it is the will of the smith which goes through his arm and hammer into the iron and converts it to steel ; he drives his will into the metal, and that becomes the fibre in it. You don't find it so in nature. The human soul must part with something and transfuse it into the inanimate iron, and

there it will lie and last, for the will of man is divine and eternal. It is much the same with all with which we have to do. I have spent time and labour over you, and thought and purpose have been consumed in making you my wife; they are none of them lost, they are all in you, they have become fibres in your soul. You may not be aware of it, but there they all are. The more one thinks and labours for the other the more he ingrafts himself in the nature of the other. I have heard of sound men having their healthy blood drawn off and injected into the veins of the sick, and restoring them thus to activity and health. We are always doing this with our wills, injecting their fire into the hearts of others, and so by degrees transfusing their natures. You are pouring yourself into me, and I into you, whether we know it or not, till in time we are alike in colour and tone and temperature.'

He had worked the piece of steel into a rude ring, not very cumbrous, and he bade Mehalah try it on her finger. It was too small. He easily enlarged it, and then got a file to smooth off the roughnesses.

'I had rather you wore this than a ring of gold,' he said, 'for there is part of my soul in this

iron. I have made it in spite of my blindness, because I had the will to do so. The whole metal is full of my purpose, which tinctures it as wine stains water; and with it goes my resolve that you shall be mine altogether in heart and soul, in love as well as in pity, for now and for all eternity. You will wear that on your finger, the finger that has a nerve leading from the heart. Stretch out your hand, Glory, and let me put it on. Stretch out your hand over the hearth, above the fire, our God is a consuming fire, and this is his proper altar.'

He stood on one side of the furnace, she on the other; the angry red coals glowed below, and a hot smoke rose from them.

She extended her hand to him, and he grasped it with the left above the fire, and held the steel ring in his right.

'Glory!' he said in a tremulous voice. 'At the altar in the church you swore to obey me. In the hall you knelt and swore to cherish me; here, over the fire, the figure of our God, as I put the iron ring on, swear to me also to love me.'

She did not answer. She stood as though frozen to ice; with her eyes on the door of the smithy, where stood a figure—the figure of a man.

Suddenly she uttered a piercing cry. 'George! my George! my George!' and withdrew her hand from the grasp of Elijah. The iron ring fell from his fingers into the red fire below and was lost.

CHAPTER XII.

THE RETURN OF THE LOST.

MEHALAH was clasped in the arms of George De Witt.

‘Who is there? Where is he?’ shouted Elijah, staggering forward with his great pincers raised ready to strike.

George drew the girl out of the way, and let the angry man burst out of the door and pass, beating the air with his iron tool. He put his arm round her, and led her from the house. She could not speak, she could only look up at him as at one risen from the dead. He led her towards the sea-wall, looking behind him at the figure of the blind man, rushing about, and smiting recklessly in his jealousy and fury, and hitting bushes, rails, walls, anything in hopes of smiting down the man whose name he had heard, and who he knew had come back to break in on and ruin his hopes.

George De Witt walked lamely, he had a somewhat stiff leg; otherwise he seemed well.

‘How manly you have grown!’ exclaimed Mehalah, holding him at arms’ length, and contemplating him with pride.

‘And you, Glory, have become more womanly; but in all else are the same.’

‘Where have you been, George?’

‘At sea, Glory, and smelt powder. I have been a sailor in His Majesty’s Royal Navy, in the *Duke of Clarence*, and I am pensioned off, because of my leg.’

‘Have you been wounded?’

‘Not exactly. A cannon-ball, as we were loading, struck me on the shin and bruised the bone, so that I have been invalided with swellings and ulcerations. I ain’t fit for active service, but I’m not exactly a cripple.’

‘But, George! when did this take place? I do not understand. After your escape?’

‘Escape, Glory? I have had no escape.’

‘From confinement in Red Hall,’ she added.

‘I never was confined there. I do not know what you are talking about.’

Mehalah passed her hand over her face.

‘George! I thought that Elijah had made you

drunk and then put you in his cellar, chained there till you went mad.'

'There is not a word of truth in this,' said De Witt. 'Who told you such a tale?'

'Elijah himself.'

'Elijah is a rascal. I have enough cause against him without that.'

'Then tell me about yourself. I am bewildered. How came you to disappear?'

'Let us walk together to the spit by the windmill, and I will tell you all.'

They turned the way he said, and he did not speak again till they had reached the spot.

'We will sit down, Glory; I suffer still somewhat from my leg, so that I am always glad to rest it. Now I will tell you the whole story. You remember the evening when we quarrelled. You had behaved rather roughly to Phœbe Musset.'

'I remember it only too well, George.'

'After you had left, I went to the Mussets' house to inquire after Phœbe, who had been well soused in the sea by you; and on my return I fell in with Elijah Rebow. He took me to task for not having gone after you and patched up our little difference. He said that a quarrel should

never be allowed to cool, but mended while hot. He persuaded me to let him row me in his boat to the Ray. He said he was going there after ducks or something of that sort, I do not remember exactly. I agreed, and got into his punt with him, and we made for the Rhyn. We had scarcely entered the channel when a lugger full of men ran across our bows and had us fast in a jiffy. I was overpowered before I knew where I was, and taken by the men into their boat.'

'Who were they, George?' asked Mehalah breathlessly.

'They were some of the crew of the *Salamander*, a war schooner then lying in the offing, come to press me into the service with Captain Macpherson, who had been on the coast guard, but was appointed to the command. I was carried off as many another man has been, without my consent, and made to serve His Majesty on compulsion.'

'But, George! how about your medal that I gave you? That was returned to me the same night.'

'I suppose it was,' he replied coolly. 'As I was taken, Elijah said to me, "Have you no token to send back to Glory?" I bade him tell you

how I was impressed, and how I would return to you whenever the war was over and I was paid off; but he asked for some token, that you might believe him. Well, Glory! I had nothing by me save your medal, and I handed it to him and told him to give it to you with my love.'

Mehalah wrung her hands and moaned.

'I have a notion,' continued George, 'that Rebow was somehow privy to my being 'pressed; for he went out that afternoon to the *Salamander* in his cutter, and had a private talk with Captain Macpherson, who was short of men. Now I fancy, though I can't prove it, that he schemed with the captain how he should catch me, and that Elijah with set purpose took me into the trap set for me. He is deep enough to do such a dirty trick.'

Mehalah's head sank on her knees, and she sobbed aloud.

'And now, Glory, dearest!' he went on, 'the rascal has got you to marry him, I am told. How could you take him? Why did you not wait for me? You were promised to me, and we looked on one another as soon to be husband and wife. You must have soon forgotten your promise.'

'I thought you were dead,' she gasped.

‘So did my mother. I do not understand. Elijah knew better.’

‘But he told no one. He allowed us all to suppose you were drowned in one of the fleets.’

‘It is very hard,’ said George, ‘for a fellow to return from the wars to reclaim his girl, and to find her no longer his. It is a great blow to me, Glory! I did so love and admire you.’

She could only sway to and fro in her distress.

‘It is very disappointing to a chap,’ said George, putting a quid in his cheek. ‘When he has calculated on getting a nice girl as his wife, and in battle and storm has had the thoughts of her to cheer and encourage him; when he has some prize-money in his pocket, and hopes to spend it on her—well, it is hard.’

‘George,’ said she between her sobs, ‘why did you return the medal? I gave it you, and you swore never to part with it. You should not have sent it to me.’

‘Did I really swear that, Glory?’ he answered; ‘if so, I had forgotten. You see I was so set upon and flustered that night, I did not rightly consider things as they should have been considered.’ He stopped.

‘Well?’ asked Mehalah eagerly.

‘Don’t catch me up, Glory. I only stopped to turn the quid. As I was about to say, I did not remember what I had promised. I had nothing else to send you that would serve as a token. The medal was an article about which there could be no mistake. I knew when you saw that you would make sure Elijah’s story was true, and my promise would be sacred—I have kept it, I have returned to you, Glory, and if you were not married I should make you my wife. I love you still, as I always did love you. I’ve seen a sight of fine girls since I left Mersea. There’s more fish in the sea than come out of it; but I’m darned if I have seen a finer anywhere, or more to my liking than you, Glory. You were my first love, and the sight of you brings back pleasant memories. The more I look at you now, the more I feel inclined to wring that old prophet’s neck. You are too good for such a chap as he; you should have waited for me. You had promised, and might have had patience. But, Lord bless me! how the girls do run after the men! Glory! I have seen the world since I left Mersea, and I know more of it than I did. I suppose you thought that as I was gone to

Davy Jones's locker you must catch whom you could.'

'George!' exclaimed Mehalah, 'do not speak to me thus. I cannot bear it. I know you are only talking in this way to try me, and because you resent my marriage. I promised once to be true to you. I gave you my heart, and I have remained, and I will remain, true to you; my heart is yours, and I can never recover it and give it to another.'

'This is very fine and sentimental, Glory,' said George; 'I've smelt powder and I know the colour of blood. I've seen the world, and know what sentiment is worth; it is blank cartridge firing; it breaks no bones, but it makes a noise and a flash. I don't see how you can call it keeping true to me when you marry another man for his money.'

'You are determined to drive me mad,' exclaimed Mehalah. 'Have mercy on me, my own George, my only George! I have loved and suffered for you. God can see into my heart, and knows how deeply it has been cut, and how profusely it has bled for you. You must spare me. I have thought of you. I have lived only in a dream of you. The world without you has been

dead and blank. I have not had a moment of real joy since your disappearance; it seems to me as though a century of torment had drawn its slow course since then. No, George! I have married for nothing but to save my self-respect. I was forced by that man, whom I will not name now, so hateful and horrible to me is the thought of him—I was forced by him from my home on the Ray to lodge under his roof. He smoked my mother and me out of our house as if we were foxes. When he had me secure he drew a magician's circle round me, and I could not break through it. My character, my name were tarnished, there was nothing for it but for me to marry him. I did so, but I did so under stipulations. I took his name, but I am not, and never shall be, more to him than his wife in the register of the parish. I have never loved him—I never undertook to love him.'

'This is a queer state of things,' said George. 'Dashed if, in all my experience of life and of girls, I came across anything similar, and I have seen something. I have not spent all my days in Mersea. I've been to the West Indies. I've seen white girls, and yellow girls, and brown girls, and copper-coloured girls, and black ones—

black as rotted seaweed. I have—they are all much of a muchness, but this beats my experience. 'You are not like others.'

'So he says ; he and I are alone in the world, and alone can understand one another. Do you understand me, George ?'

'I'm blessed if I do.'

She was silent. She was very unhappy. She did not like his tone : there was an insincerity, a priggishness about it which jarred with her reality and depth of feeling. But she could not analyse what offended her. She thought he was angry with her, and had assumed a taunting air to cover his mortification.

She drew the medal from her bosom.

'George ! dear, dear George !' she said vehemently, 'take the pledge again. I give it you with my whole heart once more. I believe it saved you once, it may save you again. At all events, it is a token to you that my heart is the same, that I care for and love none but you in the whole wide world.'

He took it and suspended it round his neck.

'I will keep it for your sake,' he said ; 'you may be sure it will be treasured by me.'

'Keep it better than you did before.'

‘Certainly I will. I shall value it inexpressibly.’

‘George!’ she went on, trembling in all her limbs, and rising to her feet. ‘George! my first and only love! as I give it you back now, I make you the same promise that I made you before. I will love—love—love you and you only, eternally. I swore then to be true to you, and I have been true. Swear again to me the same.’

‘Certainly. I shall always love you, Glory! I’m damned if it is possible for a fellow not to, you are so handsome with those flashing eyes and glowing cheeks. A fellow must be made of ice not to love you.’

‘Be true to me, as I to you.’

‘To be sure I will, Glory!’ and added in an undertone, ‘rum sort of truth hers, to go and marry another chap.’

‘What is that you say, George?’

‘Take care, Glory!’ exclaimed the sailor; ‘here comes the old prophet with a pair of tongs over his shoulder, staggering along the wall towards us. I had better sheer off. He don’t look amiable. Good-bye, Glory!’

‘Oh, George! I must see you again.’

‘I will come again. You will see me often

enough. Sailors can no more keep away from handsome girls than bees from clover.'

'George, George!'

Elijah came up, his face black with passion.

'Mehalah!' he roared, as he swung his iron pincers.

She caught his wrist and disarmed him.

'I could bite you, and tear your flesh with my teeth,' he raged. 'All was so peaceful and beautiful, and then he came from the dead and broke it into shivers. Where are you?' He put out his hands to grasp her.

'Do not touch me!' she cried, loathing in her voice. 'With my whole soul I abhor you, you base coward. You lied to me about George, a hateful lie that made me mad, and yet the reality is almost as bad—it is worse. He is alive and free, and I am bound, bound hand and foot, to you.'

CHAPTER XIII.

TIMOTHY'S TIDINGS.

‘MEHALAH!’ roared the wretched man, smiting at her with both his clenched fists, and nearly precipitating himself into the mud, by missing his object, ‘Mehalah! where are you? Come near, and let me beat and kill you.’

‘Why are you angry, Elijah?’ asked the girl. ‘The man you betrayed to the pressgang has returned, are you vexed at that?’

‘Come near me,’ he shouted.

‘You have gained your end, and may well be content that he is alive. You have separated us for ever; what more could you desire? His hopes and mine are alike shattered by your act. You lied to me about his madness, but though that wickedness was not wrought to which you pretended, you have done that which passes forgiveness.’

‘Where is he?’

‘He is gone. He would not meet you. He could not deal the punishment you deserve on a blinded man.’

‘You have been discussing me — the blinded man,’ raved Elijah. ‘Yes, you first blind me that I may not see, and then you meet and intrigue with your old lover, in security, knowing I cannot watch, and pursue, and punish you.’

‘Go back to the house, Elijah. You are in no fit temper to speak to on this subject.’

‘Oh yes! go back and sit in the hall alone, whilst you are with him — your George! No, Mehalah! I tell you this. I will not be deceived. Though I be blind, I can and will see and follow you. I will sell my soul to the devil for twenty-four hours’ vision, that I may track and catch and crush your two heads together, and trample the life out of you with my big iron-heeled boots. You shall not see him, you shall never see him again. Give me back my pincers, and I will make an end of it all.’

‘Elijah, you must trust me. I married you in self-respect, and I shall never forget the respect I owe to myself.’

‘I cannot trust you,’ he answered, ‘because you are just one of those whose movements no one

can calculate. I tell you what, Mehalah. God made most folks of clockwork and stuck them on their little plots of soil to spin round and run their courses, like the figures on an Italian barrel-organ. You look at Mersea island, that is the board of such a contrivance, and on it are so many dolls, they twist about, and you know that if God turns the handle for ten minutes or for ten years, or for ten times ten years, they will do exactly the same things in exactly the same ways, just as He made them and set them to spin. But as He was making the dolls that were to twirl and pirouette His breath got into some, and they are different from the rest. They don't go according to the clockwork, and don't follow the circles of the machine, as set agoing by the organ-handle. God himself can't count on them, for they have free wills, and His breath is genius and independence in their hearts. They go where they list, and do what they will, they follow the impulse of the breath of God within, and not the wires that fasten them to the social mechanism. I do not know what I may do. I do not know what you may do. We have the breath of God in us. I am sure that you have, and I am sure that I have ; but I know that there

is none in your mother, none in such as George De Witt. The laws of the land and of religion are the slits in the board on which the dolls dance, and they only move along these slits ; but you and I, and such as have free souls, go anywhere, and do anything. We have no law. The wind bloweth where it listeth, and thou cans't not tell whence it cometh and whither it goeth ; so is everyone that is born of the Spirit. I heard a preacher once explain that text, and he said that the wind was the Spirit of God and it went where it willed, and so all who were born of the Spirit followed their wills, and there was neither right nor wrong to them, for they were blown about, across and up and down, where others not so born dare not step, and they never forfeited their sonships whatever they did, for it was not they, but the divine will in them that drove them. Mehalah ! you are one with a free, headlong will, and how can I count on what you will do ? There is no cut track along which you must run. The puppets dance their rounds, but you rush in and out and upset those that are in your way. I am the same. You have seen and learned my way. Who could reckon on me ? I never mapped out my course, but went on as I was impelled ; and so will you. But be sure

of this, Mehalah ! I shall not endure your desertion of me. Beware how you meet and speak to George De Witt again.'

'Elijah,' said the girl ; 'I give you only what I promised you, my obedience, never expect more. Your crooked courses are not such as can gain respect, much less regard. You say that you act on impulse, and have not mapped your course. I do not believe you. You have worked with a set purpose before you to get rid of George, and obtain hold over me. Your purpose was deliberate, your plans laid in cold blood. You have got as much as you can get. You have obtained some sort of control over me, but my soul is free, my heart is free, and these you shall never bring into slavery.'

'I was ready half an hour ago to forgive you for having blinded me. I cannot forgive you now. You have done me a wicked wrong. You acted on impulse, without purpose, you say. I do not believe it. There was set design and cold scheming in it all. You knew that George De Witt was not dead—or you thought he might be yet alive and might return, so you dashed the firejuice into my eyes to blind them to what would take place on his reappearance.'

‘This is false!’ exclaimed Mehalah indignantly.

‘So is it false that I schemed and worked,’ he said. ‘Do you not understand, Mehalah, that what we do, we do for an end which we do not see? We act on the spur of passion, and the acts link together, and make a complete chain in the end. I did at the moment what I thought must be done, and so it was brought about that you became my wife. You acted as anger and love inspired, and now I am made helpless, whilst you sport with your lover. But I tell you, Mehalah, I will not endure this. I don’t care if you die and I die, but parted we shall not be. You and I must find our heaven in each other and nowhere else. You are going after wandering lights if you expect a port away from my heart. Wrecking lights attached to asses’ heads.’ He stamped and caught at her.

‘My heart was given to George before I knew you,’ said Glory sadly; ‘I have long known him, and we had long been promised to each other. We had hoped to be married this spring, and then we should have been happy, unspeakably happy. He has been true to me and I will be true to him. We cannot now marry. You have prevented

that ; but we can still love one another and be true to each other, and live in the thought and confidence of the other. He trusts me and I trust him. He is now bitterly distressed to find that you have separated us, but in time he will be reconciled, and then it will be as of old, when I was on the Ray. We shall see one another, and we shall be true, loving friends, but nothing more ; nothing more is possible. You have barred that.'

'Is this your resolve ?' he asked, turning livid with anger ; even his lips a dead leaden tint.

'It is not a resolve, it is what must be. I must love him, I cannot help it. We must see each other. We can never be man and wife, that you have succeeded in preventing, and for that I shall never forgive you. But I will not be false to my oath. I will still serve you, and I will cherish you in your wretchedness and blindness.'

'This will not do,' he cried. 'My whole nature, my entire soul, cries out and hungers for you, for your nature, for your soul. I must have your whole being as mine, I will not be master of a divided Glory ! allegiance here, love there, cold obedience to me and gushing devotion to him. The thought is unendurable. O God !' he burst forth in an agony, 'why did I not take you in my

arms when the Ray house was burning, and spring with you into the flames and hold you there in the yellow wavering tongue of fire, till we melted into one lump? Then we should both have been at peace now, both in one, and happy in our unity.' He strode up and down, with his head down.

'Mehalah! have you seen water poured on lime. What a fume and boiling takes place, the two fight together which shall obtain the mastery, but neither gets it all its own way in the end, but one enters into and penetrates every pore of the other, and the heat and the steam only continue till every part of one is impregnated with the other. You and I are mixing like water and lime, and we rage and smoke, but there is peace at the end, in view, when we are infused the one into the other, when it is neither I nor you, but one being. The mixture must be complete some day, in this life or the next; and then we shall clot into one hard rock, imperishable and indivisible.'

'Elijah! try to take interest in something else; think of something beside me. I can be nothing more to you than what I am, so rest contented with what you have got, and turn your thoughts to your farm, or anything else.'

'I cannot do it, Mehalah. I put a little plant

once in a pot and filled the vessel with rich mould, and the plant grew and at last broke the pot into a hundred pieces, and I found within a dense mat of fibres ; the root had eaten up and displaced all the soil and swelled till it rent the vessel. It has been so with my love of you. It got planted, how I know not, in my heart, and it has thrown its roots through the whole chamber, and devoured all the substance, and woven a net of fibres in and out and up and down, and has swelled and is thrusting against the walls, till there is scarce love there any more but horrible, biting, wearing pain. I cannot kill the plant and pluck it out, or it will leave a great void. I must let it grow on till it has broken up the vessel. It grows and makes root, but will not flower. There has been scarce leaf, certainly no blossom, to my love. It is all downward, inward, clogging, bursting tangle of fibre. Can you say it is so with you? You cannot. Your care for that fool George is but a slip struck in that may root or not, that must be nursed or it will wither. Tear it up and cast it away. It is not worthy of you. George is a simple fool. I know him. A clown without a soul. Why, Glory ! there are none hereabouts with souls but you and me. Your mother has

none, Mrs. De Witt has none, Abraham has none. They can't understand the ways and workings of those that have souls. They are bodies, ruled by bodily wants, and look at all things out of bodily eyes, and interpret by bodily instincts all things done by those spiritually above them. But you understand me, and I understand you. Soul speaks to soul. I've heard a preacher say that once on a time the sons of God went in unto the daughters of men, and what they begat of them were cursed of heaven. That means that men with souls married vulgar women with only instincts and appetites, and such unions are unnatural. The sons of God must marry the daughters of God, and leave the animal men and women to pig together and breed listless, dull-eyed, muddle-headed, dough-hearted, scandal-mongering generations. The curse of God would have rested upon you, if you had married George De Witt. I have saved you from that. You have mated with your equal.'

'What happiness, what blessing has attended our union?' she asked bitterly.

'None,' he replied, 'because you oppose your will to the inevitable. We must be united entirely, and blended into one, but you resist, and so misery

ensues. I am blinded and wretched, and you, you——'

'I am wretched also,' she said; 'but stay! here comes someone to speak to us.'

'Who is it?'

'I do not know exactly. A young man who came here one day with Phoebe Musset.'

'What does he want with us? I will have no young men coming here.'

The person who approached was Timothy Spark, 'cousin' to Admonition Pettican. He was dressed in a new suit of mourning. He lounged along the sea-wall with his hands in his pockets.

'Your servant, master,' he said to Elijah as he came up. 'Your most devoted servant,' he added with a bow to Mehalah, and a simper. 'Charmed to see my dear and beautiful cousin so well.'

'Cousin!' exclaimed Rebow, stepping back and frowning.

'Certainly, certainly,' said Timothy. 'I am cousin to Admonition, wife, or rather let me say widow of the late lamented Charles Pettican, and he was first cousin to Mrs. Sharland, so my pretty cousin Mehalah will not, I am sure, deny the relationship. Let me offer you an arm,' he wedged his way between Rebow and Glory.

‘First cousin once and a half removed,’ he said. ‘Drop the fractions and say cousin, broadly. Certainly, certainly so. Is it not so, my dear?’ In an undertone and aside to Mehalah, ‘Let us drop the old fellow behind. I have a word to say in your ear, Cousin Mehalah! By the way, how do you shorten that long name. It is such a mouthful. But I forget, where is my memory going? Glory is the name you go by among relatives and friends. Come along, Glory! Lean on my arm. The blind gentleman is a little unsteady on his pins and can’t keep up with us. He will be more comfortable taking his airing slowly by himself; we shall distract him with our frolicsome talk. He is in a serious mood, perhaps pious.’

‘Say what you have to say at once,’ said Elijah surlily. ‘I must hear it. What did you say about *late* Charles Pettican?’

‘The poor gentleman is deceased,’ said Timothy; ‘and his disconsolate widow is drinking down her grief in hot toddy.’

‘Mr. Charles Pettican dead!’ exclaimed Mehalah with grief.

‘Dead as Nebuchadnezzar,’ replied Timothy; ‘rather rapid at the last, the paralysis attacked his

vitals, and then it was all over with him in a snap. Fortunately, he had made his will. You haven't taken my arm yet, my pretty cousin. You won't? well then, I will continue. I flatter myself that my influence prevailed, and he made a will not in favour of Admonition, who had really become too exacting towards myself, and inconsiderate towards him, for us to endure it much longer. He threw himself on my honour, and I told him I relied on his gratitude. We put our heads together. Admonition has had a fall. She gets only a hundred pounds. My friend Charles, in token of my friendship has kindly, I may say handsomely, remembered me,—and all the bulk of his property he has bequeathed to my good cousin here, Glory. I need hardly say that this has proved as great a surprise to Admonition as it must be to you. Admonition brought it on herself. She should not have attempted to displace me; I am not a person so unimportant as to be dispensed with at pleasure. Admonition cannot recover from the shock and mortification, and I left her at Wyvenhoe, venting it in language not flattering to the late lamented. She led me a dance, and him she treated like a galley-slave, so that she has got her deserts. I saw that she was carrying it

on a little too far for the endurance of Charles, so I had a talk with him on the matter, and offered to help him in the management of his affairs for a trifling salary, and he was good enough to see how advantageous it would be to him to have me as a friend and adviser ; so we put our heads together and then Admonition tried to bundle me out of the house, and much to her surprise learned that I was as securely installed therein as herself. I was private secretary and accountant to Charles, and cousin Admonition had to knuckle under then. Curiously enough, she had picked up another cousin about that time, one I had never heard of before in my life, and she wanted to bring him into the house in my place ; I did not allow that game to be played. I kept my berth, and Admonition was in a pretty temper about it, you may be sure. How Charles chuckled ! He enjoyed it. Upon my word I believe he chuckles in his grave to think how he has done Admonition in the end ; and he smirks doubtless to consider also how he has served me.'

'What has he left Mehalah ?' asked Rebow surlily.

'I cannot tell you exactly, but I suspect about two hundred and fifty to three hundred pounds a

year ; a nice little fortune, and dropping in very unexpectedly, I presume. I am executor, and shall have the choicest pleasure in explaining all to my sweet cousin. Is it not near about your dinner-time ? ’

‘ Yes. ’

‘ Then I don’t mind picking a bone and drinking a glass with you. The drive is long from Wyvenhoe. You happen perhaps to have a spare room in the house ? ’

No answer was given to this question.

‘ Because I have brought over my little traps. I thought it best. We can talk over matters, and I will show you what the amount of property is that Charles has left. I have the will with me, it is not proved yet. I shall do that shortly. ’

‘ There’s an inn at Salcott. The “ Rising Sun. ” You can go there. We do not take in strangers. ’

‘ Certainly, certainly ! only you see, ’ touching Elijah knowingly in the ribs, ‘ I’m not a stranger, but a friend and relative of the family, a cousin, you understand, a cousin, and ready to make myself agreeable to one ’ with a bow to Mehalah, ‘ and useful to the other, ’ with a tap on Rebow’s arm.

‘ You can settle all you have to say on business

in an hour if you stick to it, and then you can be gone,' said Elijah in ill-temper, withdrawing his arm from the familiar touch.

'Certainly, certainly,' said Timothy. 'But then, I must call again, and yet again, always I am sure, with increasing pleasure, but still at some inconvenience to myself. I thought I might just settle in here, you might give me a shake-down in any nook, and I would make myself a most invaluable member of the family. You, old gentleman, with your affliction, want an overlooker to the farm, and who could serve your purpose better than myself, a friend and a relation, a cousin, almost first cousin, with just a remove or so between, not worth particularising. I could devote my time to your affairs—'

'I don't want you. I will not have you!' exclaimed Rebow angrily. 'Why have you come here, you meddling puppy? Did I ask you to come? Did Mehalah want you? I know you and your ways. You got into Pettican's house hanging on to the skirts of his wife, and then made mischief between man and wife; and now you come here to play the same game; you come because I am blind and helpless, and sneaking behind my Glory; you want to steal in to

play the fool with her and set us one against the other. We want none of you here. We are not so tender together that we desire another element of discord to enter into the jangled clash of bells. Be off with you. As for the matter of Mehalah's inheritance, the lawyers shall communicate with us, and between you and her. I will not have you set your foot inside my house.'

'Stay,' said Glory; 'I must know if this be really true. Am I really inheritor of such a fortune?'

'I have the will in my pocket.'

'Show it me.'

Timothy produced the document and read it to Elijah and Mehalah. Both drew near.

'Let me see it!' said Rebow vehemently, and grasped at the paper with nervous hand.

'My good friend,' remarked Timothy patronisingly; 'The state of your eyes, if I mistake not, will prevent your being able to read it.'

'I must feel it then.'

He grasped it fiercely and in a moment tore it with his hands, and then, biting the fragments, rent it further and further.

'For heaven's sake!' exclaimed the young man in dismay.

‘Ha! Glory! Did you suppose you were to be made independent of me? Did you think I would let you get a fortune of your own, to emancipate you from me? That you might go off with it, and enjoy it along with your George De Witt?’

He dashed the tatters about him.

‘You mad fool!’ exclaimed Timothy Spark. ‘Do you suppose that by such a scurvy trick as this you will despoil my pretty cousin of her money, and perhaps of her liberty?’

‘I have done it,’ shouted Rebow wrathfully. ‘You cannot make the will whole, I have chewed and swallowed portions, and others the winds have taken into the sea.’

‘Indeed!’ said Timothy. ‘Do you suppose that this is the original? Of course not. It is an authenticated copy. The original will is left with Morrell the lawyer, and this is but a transcript.’

Rebow gnashed his teeth.

‘It seems to me,’ said Timothy, ‘that after all I shall be called upon to step in between husband and wife, and to protect my pretty dark-eyed, rosy lipped cousin. I am sure you have a spare room where I can have a shake-down.’

CHAPTER XIV.

TEMPTATION.

ELIJAH REBOW sank into a sullen fierce silence. He scarcely stirred from the house except to the forge, where he groped among the dead ashes for the iron ring, which however he never found. He sat in his hall, smoking, his elbows on the arms of his chair, his head sunk on his breast, with his dull eyes on the floor. He seemed brooding over something, which occupied all his thoughts, and he rarely spoke.

There had been little difficulty in getting rid of Timothy. He lingered a day or two about Salcott and Red Hall, but as he met with angry repulse from Rebow, and no encouragement from Mehalah, he abandoned the ground as unproductive. He was an idle, good-for-nothing young man, hating work, and when he was obliged to leave comfortable quarters at Wyvenhoe, hoped to settle himself into a similar position at Salcott. He

was conceited, and fancied himself able to make conquests when he liked, and never for a moment doubted that his looks and address would have ingratiated him with Mehalah, and won him a lodgment in the house. He had been hovering about Phoebe Musset for some time, as she was thought to have money. Her parents had no other child, and the farm and shop would have suited him. When he met with a rebuff at Red Hall he betook himself to Mersea, and was much surprised to be received there with coldness where he had expected warmth. The reason was that George De Witt had returned, a sailor in the Royal Navy, covered with glory according to his own account, and Phoebe was more disposed to set her cap at him than flirt with the shore-loafer, Timothy Spark.

As Mehalah was crossing the farm yard one day, old Abraham Dowsing stopped her.

‘I want to speak along of you,’ he said in his uncouth, abrupt manner. ‘What does the master mean by his goings on? I saw him to-day after his dinner sitting with the great knife in his hand. The door was open and I was at the bottom of the steps, and I looked up, and there he was making stabs with it into the air. Then he got up, and

holding the knife behind him, he crept over towards your mother's leather backed chair. I seed him feel at it, and when he did touch it, then there came a wild look over his face, and he out with the carving knife, quick as thought, and he clutched the back of the chair with his left, and dug the blade right into the leather, and it came through at the back. You look next time you go into the hall. I guess he's going as his brother did.'

'Going out of his mind, Abraham?'

'Yes, I reckon. What else does it all mean? It is either that, or there is something that deadly angers him.'

He looked with a cunning covert glance at her.

'It is not that these matters concern me, over much, but I don't want to change places in my old age. I'm comfortable enough here. I gets my wittles regular, and my swipes of ale. Take care of yourself, Mistress. I've heard as how the master got somebody pressed when he was in the way,—there's a tale about it abroad. He won't stand that party about here much, and I wouldn't adwise the encouragement of him.'

'George De Witt is my friend. He may come

when he likes,' said Mehalah gravely. 'He and I have known one another since we were children, and my marriage need not destroy an old friendship.'

'I mentioned no names,' said the old man. 'You can't say I did. One thing I be sure of. Whenever somebody comes here, the master knows it; he knows it by a sort of instinct, I fancy. I see him at the head of the steps looking out as though he could see, and biting at the air, just as a mad dog snaps at everything and nothing.'

'There is George!' suddenly exclaimed Mehalah, as she saw the young sailor's figure rise on the sea-wall.

'And there is the master,' muttered Abraham, pointing to Elijah, who appeared at his door, peering about, and holding his hand to his ear.

Mehalah hesitated a moment, and then went up the steps to him.

'Do you want to come down?' she asked; 'shall I lead you?'

'Yes, help me.' He clutched her hand by the wrist and came out and stood on the stair. Then he grasped her shoulder with the other hand, and he began to shake and twist her.

She could see into his heart as into clear

water, to the ugly snags and creeping things at the bottom. She saw that the temptation had come on him to fling her down: but she saw also that it was immediately overcome. He knew she read his thoughts. 'The height is not much,' he muttered; 'you might sprain an ankle but not break your neck. I will not hurt you, do not fear. Hurt you! Good God! I would not hurt you, not give you one moment's pain, I would bear hours of agony rather than make you suffer for one second. But what must be, must be! There is no way out of the marsh but over the dyke. There is no peace which is not won by a fight and wounds. Let me go back.' He drew her in at the door, a ferocious expression flickered over his face, like phosphorescent illumination over dead fish.

'I cannot endure this longer. Mehalah! you are killing me. This is worse than the fire-juice in my eyes, you are drenching my heart and brain in vitriol, I feel it gnawing and stinging and blackening as it consumes a way to the inner core, leaving charred matter behind.'

'What am I doing, to make you suffer?' she asked.

'You are doing all you can. I cannot, I wil

not endure that agony. Have you seen the coal heap in the forge, how the fire rages and glows within before the blast ! Water is thrown on without quenching the fire, it only intensifies its heat. At last the black mass cracks on all sides and the white fury shoots out in spits and knives of flame ? It is so with me. The fire is here.' He smote his breast and then his brain. 'It is raging, panting, whitening, intensifying, and at last it will break out on all sides. Who is blowing the fire into vehemence ? It is you—you—you !'

He gathered himself up, like a crouching beast, as though to spring on her and strangle or tear her ; but she stepped back beyond his spring.

'I give you no occasion for this,' she said ; 'you speak and act like a madman.'

'It is you who drive me to act and speak like one,' he cried. 'You are now mistress of yourself, you have money—as much as you want ; now you will shake me off. Now you will desert the man who stood between you and your fool. You will go off with him and forget me. It shall not be.' He clutched his hands into his sides. 'It never shall be.'

'I will not listen to this. I will not endure

such words,' she exclaimed. 'Remain here and cool.' Then she left the room, and, walking across the pasture to the landing-place, extended her hand with a smile to George. It was a relief to her to be away for a while from the gloom and savagery of the man to whom she was bound for life. In her simplicity and guilelessness she would not believe that there was any wrong in meeting the friend of her childhood, her almost brother. She needed some light on her sad life, and the light shone from him.

'My dear Glory,' he said, 'I am delighted to see you. What a colour there is in your cheeks. Has the prophet been in his frenzies again? I fear so. You must not allow it. You should not endure it.'

'How can I help it, George? it is the man's nature to rave; he has it in his blood. I almost fear he will go mad like his poor brother.'

'The sooner the better.'

'Do not say that. You do not know how dreadful was the condition of that miserable wretch.'

'I do say it, Glory, dearest! I say it, because the sooner you are freed from this tyranny and torture, the better for both of us.'

‘How so?’

‘Glory, dear! is it true that you have been left a small fortune?’

‘Yes, it is true. It seems that there is money in various securities, the savings of Charles Pettican’s life, and they bring in something like three hundred pounds a year. Sometimes it may be less, sometimes perhaps more.’

‘And is this money absolutely your own?’

‘Entirely.’

‘You may do with it what you like?’

‘Yes, altogether; even Elijah cannot touch it. I will give you all if you like, or as much as you like.’

‘I would not touch it without you, Glory!’

She sighed.

‘Oh George, George! to think how happy we might have been!’

‘We may be, Glory.’

‘I do not see how that is possible. I have no more any hopes, but it is a great pleasure to me to see you and to hear you talk. I think of old days and old dreams of happiness.’

‘Why, Glory! with three hundred a year we might have lived as gentlefolks, doing nothing. We might have bought a little house and garden

just anywhere, at the other end of England, in Scotland, or where you liked, away from all ugly sights and memories.'

'I had no ugly memories in the old days,' she said sorrowfully.

'I suppose not. But you have now. My Glory! how delightful it would be to cast all the horrible past away like a bad dream; all the past from when I was pressed into the service, to now—to drop it all out of memory as though it never had been, and to take up the story of life from that interruption.'

'Oh, George!' She trembled and gave one great sob, that shook her.

'How we should live to one another, live in one another, and love one another. Why, Glory! we should not care for any others to come and disturb us, we should be so happy——'

She covered her face.

'On three hundred a year,' he went on. 'That is a beautiful sum. I suppose you need not live here on it: you might live where you liked on the money. It is not laid out on land in Wyvenhoe?'

'No, no.'

'You might take, let us suppose, a cottage by

Plymouth Harbour. I have been there ; it is a lovely spot, where you would see ships of all sorts sailing by ; and just draw your money and live at ease.'

'I suppose so.'

'And nobody there would know you, whence you came, and what your history. They would not care to ask. That would be a new life, and in it all the past would be forgotten.'

'Why do you talk like this to me, George? I cannot bear it. You raise pictures before me which never can exist. All I want is to live on here in my sorrow and difficulties, and just now and then to see you and talk to you, and thus to get refreshed and go back to my duties again with a lighter heart, and strengthened to bear my burden.'

'I do not understand what you mean by duties,' he said. 'You have told me more than once that you have only formally taken Elijah Rebow as a husband, but that he is nothing to you in reality, you do not love him, and have no tie to bind you to him save the farce you went through with him in church.'

'There is another,' said Mehalah in a faint tone.

‘What other? What other can there be? You do not look on him as your husband, do you?’

‘No I do not, and I never will.’

‘You do not even wear a wedding ring.’

‘No.’

‘He understood that he was to be regarded by you in no other light than as one who gave his name to you in consideration for some service.’

‘That was all.’

‘Then I cannot see that you are not free. You promised to be my wife, quite as solemnly as you have promised anything to Elijah, and you made your agreement with him on the supposition that I was dead. He knew he was deceiving you, and that I was alive to claim the fulfilment of your oath to me. He got your promise from you under false representations, and it cannot stand. You did not know how matters stood, or you would never have taken it.’

‘Never, never!’

‘Through all, you say, you have held true to me.’

‘Indeed I have, George.’

‘Then Glory, my dearest, our course is quite clear. You are not bound to this man, but you are bound to me. Your tie to him is worthless

and is snapped ; your tie to me is strong and holds. I insist on the fulfilment, I have a right to do so. I must have you as my own. Come away with me. Come to any part of England, where you will, where we are not known, where our names have never been heard, and we will be properly married in a church, and live together happily the rest of our lives. As for your mother, she is failing fast. I will wait till her death, or we can take her away at once with us.'

'Oh George, George!' Mehalah's tones were those of one in acute pain. She flung herself on the ground at his feet, and clasped her hands on her brow.

He looked at her with some surprise : 'This will be a change for the better. You will escape out of darkness into sunshine, and leave all your miseries in this hateful marsh behind your back.'

'George ! George !' she moaned.

'Elijah deserves not a thought,' he went on. 'He has behaved like a villain from beginning to end, and if he is served out now, no one will pity him.'

'It is impossible, George !' exclaimed Mehalah, lifting herself on her knees and holding her knitted fingers against her heart. 'It cannot be,

George. It never can be. There is another tie that I cannot break.'

'What tie?'

'I must own it, though it steep me in shame. It was I, George, who blinded him, I in mad fear and anger mingled, not knowing what I did, poured the vitriol over his eyes.'

George De Witt drew back from her.

'Glory! how dreadful!'

'It is dreadful, but it was done without premeditation. He had me in his arms and told me what he had done to you—' she corrected herself —'what he pretended he had done to you, and then he tried to kiss me, and in a moment of loathing and effort to escape I did the deed. I did not know what was in the bottle. I did not know what I laid hold of.'

'You are a dangerous person to deal with, Glory. I should be sorry to provoke you. I do not understand you.'

'I suppose you do not,' she said, with a sob; 'but you must see this, George. I have blinded him and made him a helpless creature dependent on me. I did it, and I must atone for it. I brought him into this condition, and I must expiate what I did by helping him to bear the affliction.'

‘He exasperated you.’

‘Yes, but think what he is now, a wreck. I must tow the wreck into port. There is no help for it; I cannot leave him, I have brought this on myself, and I must bear it.’

‘Glory! what nonsense! You do not love me or you would at once come away with me, and leave him to his fate. He has richly deserved it.’

‘I not love you!’ she cried. ‘Oh George! how can you doubt that I do? I have suffered for you, dreamed of you, lived for you. My world without you is a world without a sun.’

‘Then come with me.’

‘I cannot do it. I have done that which binds me to Elijah. I must not leave him.’

‘You will not. Hark!’ A burst of merry bells from West Mersea church tower swept over the water. ‘There is a wedding to-day yonder, and the bells are being pealed in honour of it. Did the bells peal when you were married?’

‘No.’

‘They shall when you become mine. Not those Mersea bells, but some others where we are not known.’

‘It cannot, it cannot be. George! do not tempt and torture me. I must not leave Elijah

I have linked my fate to his by my own mad act, and that cannot be undone. O George ! if it had not been for *that*, I might have listened to you and followed you ; for I am not, and never will be his ; but now I cannot desert him in his darkness and despair. I could not be happy with you if I were to leave him.'

'This is too bad of you,' said the young man angrily. 'You are to me an incomprehensible girl.'

'Can we not live on as we are at present, true to each other yet separated?'

'No, we cannot. It is not in nature. I will tell you what, Glory ! If you do not come away with me and marry me, I will marry someone else. There are more fish in the sea than come out of it.'

She rose to her feet and stood back, and looked at him with wide open eyes. 'George, this is a cruel jest. It should not be uttered.'

'It is no jest, but sober earnest,' he answered sullenly. 'Glory ! I don't see why I should not marry as well as you.'

'Oh George ! George ! do not speak to me in this way. I have been true to you, and you have promised to be true to me.'

'Conditionally,' he interjected.

‘You could not do it. You could not take another woman to your heart. George! you talk of impossibilities.’

‘Indeed! Do you think that another girl would not have me? If so, you are mistaken.’

‘You could not do it;’ she persisted. ‘If you were to, it would not be the George I knew and loved and lost, but another. The George I knew, and loved, and lost was true to me as I to him; he could no more take another to his heart than can I.’

‘But you have, Glory.’

‘I have not. Elijah sits nowhere near my heart.’

‘I do not believe it. If he did not, you would shake him off without another thought and follow me.’

‘Do you not see,’ she cried passionately, holding out both her palms, and trembling with her vehemence, ‘that I cannot. I by my own act have made him helpless, and would you have me desert him in his helplessness? I cannot do it. There is something in here, in my bosom, I know not what it is, but it will not let me. If I were to go against that I should never be at ease.’

‘You are not at ease now.’

That would be different. I have my sorrow now, but my distress then would be of another sort and utterly unendurable. I cannot explain myself. George! you ought to understand me. If I were to say these words to Elijah he would see through my heart at once, and all the thoughts in it would be visible to him as painted figures in a church window. To you they seem all broken and jumbled and meaningless.'

'I tell you again, Glory, I do not understand you. Perhaps it is as well that we should live apart. I hate to have a knot in my hands I can't untie. If Elijah understands you, keep to him. I shall look for a mate elsewhere.'

'George!' she said plaintively, 'You are angry and offended. I am sorry for it. I will do anything for you. True to you I must and will remain, but I will not leave Elijah and follow you. I could not do it.'

'Very well then, I shall look for a wife elsewhere.'

'You cannot do it,' she said.

'Can I not?' echoed George De Witt with a laugh; 'I rather believe there is a nice girl at Mersea who only wants to be asked to jump into my arms. It seems to me that I owe her re-

paration for your treatment of her once on my boat.'

'What!'

'Now, Glory! let us understand one another. If you will run off with me—and I see nothing but some silly sentiment to hinder you—then we will be married and live happily together on your little fortune and my pension and what I can pick up.'

She shook her head.

'If you will not, why then, I shall go straight from here to Phœbe Musset, and ask her to be my wife; and you may take my word for it that in three weeks the bells that are now pealing from Mersea tower will be pealing again for us.'

'You could not do it.'

'Indeed I will. I shall go direct to her. My mother wishes it, and I know that Phœbe is ready with her yes.'

'You can take her, *her*, to your heart?'

'Delighted to do so.'

'Then, George! I never knew you, I never understood you.'

'I dare say not, no more than I can understand you. Once again, will you come with me?'

'No, never.'

‘ You never loved me. I shall go to Phœbe and have done with Glory.’

She lifted her hands to heaven, pressed them to her heart, and then ran with extended arms back to Red Hall, stumbling and recovering herself, and fluttering on, still with arms outstretched, like a wounded bird trying to rise but unable, seeking a covert where it may hide its head and die.

CHAPTER XV.

TO WEDDING BELLS.

SHE ran on. Red Hall was before her. The sun had set, and scarlet, amber, and amethyst were the tints of the sky, blotted by the great bulk of the old house standing up alone against the horizon.

She ran on, and the wedding bells of Mersea steeple chanted joyously in the summer evening air, and the notes flew over the flats like melodious wildfowl.

She ran up the steps, in at the door of the hall, where sat Elijah with his finger feeling the inscription on the chimneypiece, with the red light glaring through the western window on his forehead, staining it crimson.

She cast herself at his feet; she placed her elbows on his knees, and laid her head upon them. Dimly he saw the scarlet cap like a broken poppy droop and fall before him, he put out his hand and it rested upon it.

She had come to him, to the only heart that was constant, that was not to be shaken and moved from its anchorage; to the only soul that answered to her own, to the only mind that read her thoughts. The George of her fancy, the ideal of truth and steadfastness, was dissolved, and had disappeared leaving a mean vulgar object behind from which she shrank. To him whom she had hated, with whom she had fought and against whom she had stiffened her back, she now flew as her only support, her only anchorage.

She could not speak, her thoughts chased through her head in wild disorder like the clouds when there are cross currents in the sky.

Now and then a spasmodic sob broke from her and shook her.

‘What is the matter, Mehalah? Where have you been?’

She did not answer. She could not. She was choking. Perhaps she did not hear him, or hearing did not understand the import of his words.

She saw only the falling to pieces into dust of an idol. Better had George died, and she had lived on looking upon him as her ideal of manhood, noble, straightforward, truthful, constant.

She would have been content to drudge on in her weary life at Red Hall and would have borne Elijah's humours and her mother's fretfulness, without a hope herself, if only she might still have maintained intact her image of all that was honourable and steadfast. She could not bear the revulsion of feeling. She was like a religionist, who on lifting the purple veil of the sanctuary, has found his God, before whom he had offered libations and prayers, to be some grovelling beast.

‘Where have you been?’ again asked Elijah placing his hands on her shoulders.

She raised her head, and gasped for breath, she essayed to speak but could not.

‘Why do you not answer me?’ he asked, not with fierceness in his tone, but with iron resolve.

‘Mehalah!’ he said firmly, solemnly. ‘There have passed many days since George De Witt returned, and since Charles Pettican’s bequest has rendered you independent of me. I have waited, and wanted to hold you, as I hold you now, firmly, fast in my strong hands. You feel them on your shoulders. They shall never let go. Now that I hold I shall hold fast. Mehalah! we have old scores to wipe out. Days and weeks of blind agony in me, hours, days of horrible internal

torture whilst George De Witt has been here. I hold you now and all must now be made square between us.'

She tried to raise her hands, but he held her shoulders so tightly she could not move them.

'Elijah!' she said, 'do with me what you will. It is all one to me.'

'Where have you been? with whom have you been?'

'I have been with him.'

'I knew it. You shall never be with him again.'

She sighed. She knew that he spoke truly. Never could she see him again, in the old light; she never could meet him again on the old footing.

'Mehalah!' he went on, and his hands shook, and shook her; 'I have loved you; but now I hate and love you at the same time. You have caused me to suffer tortures, the like of which I could not suppose it possible any man could have endured, and have lived. You little knew and less cared what I endured in my eyes when they were burnt out. You little know and less care what I have endured in my soul since George De Witt has been back.'

‘Elijah,’ she said raising her heavy head, ‘let me speak. George——’

‘No never,’ he interrupted, ‘never shall you utter his name again.’ He covered her mouth with his hand.

‘No, I could not bear it;’ he went on. ‘Mehalah! your heart has never been mine, and I will not endure to be longer without it. Could you come to my breast and let my arms lap round you and our hearts beat against each other’s bosom, and glue your lips to mine? No, no,’ he answered himself. ‘Not now, I cannot expect it. He has stood in my path, he has risen out of the waters to part us. Whilst we are on the earth, we cannot be united, because he intercepts the current which runs from my heart to yours, and from yours to mine. Although he might be far away, a thousand miles distant, yet the tide of your affection would set to him. The moon they tell us is some hundreds of thousands of miles from the ocean, and yet the water throbs and rises, and falls and retreats responsive to the impulse of the moon, because moon and earth are both in one sphere. As long as you and he are together in one orb, there is no peace for me, your love will never flow to me and dance and sparkle about me

I must look elsewhere for peace, elsewhere for union, without which there is no peace. Lift up your head, Mehalah! Why is it resting thus heavily on my knee? I do not know what has come over you. Yes—' he said suddenly, in a louder tone, 'Yes I do know what it is. It is the shadow of the cloud, the scent before the rain. You have crept to me, you have cast yourself at my feet, you have leaned your head on my knee, you lift your arms to my heart, for the consummation is at hand. Mehalah! Do you understand me?'

'Yes.'

'Yes. We two understand each other, and none others can. Now, Mehalah! Glory! you shall not escape me. Glory! will you kiss me?'

He put his hand to her head, and felt it shaken in the negative.

'No. I did not suppose you would. You would kiss George, but not me; but you never shall belong to another but me. Hold up your face, Glory!'

He lifted it with one hand, and peered at it through the haze that ever attended him.

'Glory!' he said. 'Will you swear to me, if I let you go one minute, that you will place your-

self here, at my feet, in my hands, as you lie now?’

‘Yes.’

‘It is dark, is it not? I can see nothing, not your flaming cap. I will let you go. I can trust your lightest word. Go and kindle me a candle.’ He relaxed his grasp, and she staggered to her feet, and dully, in a dream obeyed. There was a candle on the chimney-piece, she took it to the hearth in the kitchen and lighted it there. The charwoman was gone.

‘Go upstairs,’ he said. ‘There has been no sound in the house this hour. Go and kiss your mother and come back.’

She obeyed again, and crept lifelessly up the stairs; in another moment he heard a low long muffled wail.

He listened. She did not return.

‘Mehalah!’ he called.

He waited a minute and then called again.

She came down bearing the light. He did not see, but the candle glittered in tears rolling down her cheeks.

‘Come to your place’ he ordered. ‘Remember you swore.’

She threw herself at his feet.

‘My mother! my mother!’

‘She is dead,’ said Elijah. ‘I knew it. I heard her feebly cry for you, an hour ago, and I crept upstairs, and I listened by her bed, and held my hand to her heart till it ceased.’

Mehalah did not speak, her frame shook with emotion.

He took the candle, raised her face with his hand under the chin and held the light close to it.

‘I cannot see much,’ he said; ‘I can see scarce anything of the dear face, of the great brown eyes I loved so well, I can see only something flame there. That is the cap.’ He took it off and passed his hand through her rich hair. ‘I can see, I think I can see, the flicker of the candle flame in the eyes. I can see the mouth, that mouth I have never touched, but I see it only as a red evening cloud across the sky.’

‘Let me go!’ she wailed. ‘My mother! my mother!’

‘We will go together to her,’ he answered; ‘stay one moment.’

He put down the candle, and once more laid his hand on her head, and now he pressed it back with his left hand. Did she see in the dull eyes a gathering moisture, the rising of a tide? A tear

ran down each of his rugged cheeks. Then he suddenly rose, and he struck her full in the forehead with his iron fist, heavy as a sledge hammer. She dropped in a heap on the floor.

‘Glory! my own, own Glory!’ he cried, and listened.

There was no answer.

‘Glory! my love! my pride! my second self! my double!’

He caught her up, and she hung across his knee. He held his ear to her mouth and hearkened.

‘Oh Glory! my own! my own!’

He stretched his hand above the mantelpiece and plucked down the chain and padlock; he secured the key. Then he cast the chain over his arm and drew the inanimate girl to him and held her in his firm grasp, and lifted her over his shoulder, and felt his way out at the door and down the steps.

No one was in the yard. No one on the pasture.

The sun had set some time, but there was blood and fire on the horizon, clouds seamed with flame, and streaks of burning crimson.

He cautiously descended the stairs, and cross-

ing the yard, made his way over the pasture to the landing place. He knew the path well. He could have trod it in the darkest night without error. He came to the sea-wall, and there he laid Mehalah, whilst he groped for his boat, and unloosed the rope that attached it to the shore.

He returned, and took up the still unconscious girl.

He felt her feeble breath on his cheek as he carried her, but he did not see the spot of returning colour in her face. He was eager, and hasty. He knew no delay, but pressed on. He carried her into the boat and took his oars and began to row, with her lying in the bottom.

The tide was running out. His instinct guided him.

The bells of Mersea tower were dancing a merry peal.

The windows of the 'Leather Bottle' were lighted up, and the toppers were drinking prosperity to the married pair.

George De Witt was making his way to the Mussets, little conscious that Mehalah was lying in a boat, stunned, and being carried out seaward.

Presently Elijah felt sure by the fresher breeze and increased motion that he was out of the fleet

in deep water. Then he quietly shipped his oars.

He lifted Mehalah, and drew her into his arms and laid her against his heart.

‘My Glory! my own dearest! my only one!’ he moaned. ‘I could not help it. You would have left me, had I not done this. There was no other way out of the tangle, there was no other path into the light. Glory! we were created for each other, but a perverse fortune has separated your heart from mine here. We shall meet and unite in another world. We must do so, we were born for each other. Glory! Glory!’

She stirred and opened her eyes, and drew a long breath.

‘Are you waking, Glory?’ he asked. ‘Hark, hark! the marriage bells are ringing, ringing, ringing, for you and me. Now Glory! now only is our marriage! now only, locked together, shall we find rest.’

He took the iron chain, and wound it round her and him, tying them together tight, and then he fastened the padlock and flung the key into the sea.

‘Once I turned the key in the lock carelessly, and he who was bound by this chain escaped. I

have fastened it firmly now, it will not fall apart for all eternity. Now Glory ! Now we are bound together for everlasting.'

She sighed.

'Do you hear me?' he asked. 'It is well. Glory ! one kiss!'

He put down his hand into the bottom of the boat, and drew out the plug, and tossed it overboard. At once the cold sea-water rushed in and overflowed his feet.

'Glory!' he cried, and he folded her to his heart, and fastened his lips fiercely, ravenously to hers.

He felt her heart throb, faintly indeed, but really.

Merrily pealed the musical bells. Cans of ale had been supplied the ringers, and they dashed the ropes about in a fever of intoxication and sympathy. Joy to the wedded pair ! Long life and close union and happiness without end ! The toppers at the 'Leather Bottle' brimmed their pewter mugs and drank the toast with three cheers.

The water boiled up, through the plughole, and the boat sank deeper. Life was beginning to return to Mehalah, but she neither saw nor knew aught. Her eyes were open and turned seaward,

to the far away horizon, and Elijah relaxed his hold one instant.

‘Elijah!’ she suddenly exclaimed, ‘How cold!’

‘Glory! Glory! It is fire! We are one!’

The bells pealed over the rolling sea—no boat was on it, only a sea-mew skimming and crying.

THE END.

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